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Yours
Walter Bagehot

LITERARY STUDIES

(MISCELLANEOUS ESSAYS)

BY

WALTER BAGEHOT

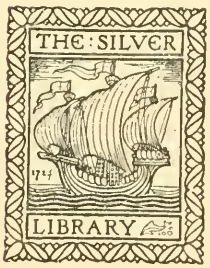
M A AND FELLOW OF UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, LONDON

EDITED, WITH A PREFATORY MEMOIR, BY

RICHARD HOLT HUTTON

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.



NEW IMPRESSION

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON

NEW YORK, BOMBAY, AND CALCUTTA

1910

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE.

Issued in "Silver Library," *July*, 1895; vol. i. reprinted *August*, 1897; reissued in new style, *June*, 1898; Reprinted *February*, 1902; *September*, 1905; and *June*, 1910.

ADVERTISEMENT.

SEVERAL of the following Essays were published by Mr. Bagehot himself in a volume which appeared in 1858, entitled, *Estimates of some Englishmen and Scotchmen*—a volume which has now long been out of print. The date of these and all other Essays republished in these volumes is given in the Table of Contents.

In preparing this edition I have been indebted to the very carefully annotated edition of Mr. Bagehot's works, brought out at Hartford, Connecticut, U.S.A., by Mr. Forrest Morgan, of the Travellers' Insurance Society. In some cases I think the American editor has missed Mr. Bagehot's meaning, and I have not, therefore, accepted all his corrections. I have now added three papers to this work which have not been previously republished, those on Oxford, the Crédit Mobilier, and Lawyers. I have been urged to save the first of these from oblivion by friends of Mr. Bagehot, who are specially good judges of the subject treated.

The portrait is from a photograph taken by Monsieur Adolphe Beau in 1864.

R. H. H.

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MEMOIR

BY THE EDITOR.

It is inevitable, I suppose, that the world should judge of a man chiefly by what it has gained in him, and lost by his death, even though a very little reflection might sometimes show that the special qualities which made him so useful to the world implied others of a yet higher order, in which, to those who knew him well, these more conspicuous characteristics must have been well-nigh merged. And while, of course, it has given me great pleasure, as it must have given pleasure to all Bagehot's friends, to hear the Chancellor of the Exchequer's evidently genuine tribute to his financial sagacity in the Budget speech of 1877, and Lord Granville's eloquent acknowledgments of the value of Bagehot's political counsels as Editor of the *Economist*, in the speech delivered at the London University on May 9, 1877, I have sometimes felt somewhat unreasonably vexed that those who appreciated so well what I may almost call the smallest part of him, appeared to know so little of the essence of him,—of the high-spirited, buoyant, subtle, speculative nature in which the imaginative qualities were even more remarkable than the judgment, and were, indeed, at the root of all that was strongest in the judgment,—of the gay and

dashing humour which was the life of every conversation in which he joined,—and of the visionary nature to which the commonest things often seemed the most marvellous, and the marvellous things the most intrinsically probable. To those who hear of Bagehot only as an original political economist and a lucid political thinker, a curiously false image of him must be suggested. If they are among the multitude misled by Carlyle, who regard all political economists as "the dreary professors of a dismal science," they will probably conjure up an arid disquisitionist on value and cost of production; and even if assured of Bagehot's imaginative power, they may perhaps only understand by the expression, that capacity for feverish preoccupation which makes the mention of "Peel's Act" summon up to the faces of certain fanatics a hectic glow, or the rumour of paper currencies blanch others with the pallor of true passion. The truth, however, is that the best qualities which Bagehot had, both as economist and as politician, were of a kind which the majority of economists and politicians do not specially possess. I do not mean that it was in any way an accident that he was an original thinker in either sphere; far from it. But I do think that what he brought to political and economical science, he brought in some sense from *outside* their normal range,—that the man of business and the financier in him fell within such sharp and well-defined limits, that he knew better than most of his class where their special weakness lay, and where their special functions ended. This, at all events, I am quite sure of, that so far as his judgment was sounder than other men's—and on many subjects it was much sounder—it was so not in spite of,

but in consequence of, the excursive imagination and vivid humour which are so often accused of betraying otherwise sober minds into dangerous aberrations. In him both lucidity and caution were directly traceable to the force of his imagination.

Walter Bagehot was born at Langport on February 3, 1826. Langport is an old-fashioned little town in the centre of Somersetshire, which in early days returned two members to Parliament, until the burgesses petitioned Edward I. to relieve them of the expense of paying their members,—a quaint piece of economy of which Bagehot frequently made humorous boast. The town is still a close corporation, and calls its mayor by the old Saxon name of Portreeve, and Bagehot himself became its Deputy-Recorder, as well as a Magistrate for the County Situated at the point where the river Parret ceases to be navigable, Langport has always been a centre of trade; and here in the last century Mr. Samuel Stuckey founded the Somersetshire Bank, which has since spread over the entire county, and is now the largest private bank of issue in England. Bagehot was the only surviving child of Mr. Thomas Watson Bagehot, who was for thirty years Managing Director and Vice-Chairman of Stuckey's Banking Company, and was, as Bagehot was fond of recalling, before he resigned that position, the oldest joint-stock banker in the United Kingdom. Bagehot succeeded his father as Vice-Chairman of the Bank, when the latter retired in his old age. His mother, a Miss Stuckey, was a niece of Mr. Samuel Stuckey, the founder of the Banking Company, and was a very pretty and lively woman, who had, by her previous marriage with a son of Dr. Estlin of Bristol, been

brought at an early age into an intellectual atmosphere by which she had greatly profited. There is no doubt that Bagehot was greatly indebted to the constant and careful sympathy in all his studies that both she and his father gave him, as well as to a very studious disposition, for his future success. Dr. Prichard, the well-known ethnologist, was her brother-in-law, and her son's marked taste for science was first awakened in Dr. Prichard's house in Park Row, where Bagehot often spent his half-holidays while he was a schoolboy in Bristol. To Dr. Prichard's *Races of Man* may, indeed, be first traced that keen interest in the speculative side of ethnological research, the results of which are best seen in Bagehot's book on *Physics and Politics*.

I first met Bagehot at University College, London, when we were neither of us over seventeen. I was struck by the questions put by a lad with large dark eyes and florid complexion to the late Professor De Morgan, who was lecturing to us, as his custom was, on the great difficulties involved in what we thought we all understood perfectly—such, for example, as the meaning of 0, of negative quantities, or the grounds of probable expectation. Bagehot's questions showed that he had both read and thought more on these subjects than most of us, and I was eager to make his acquaintance, which soon ripened into an intimate friendship, in which there was never any intermission between that time and his death. Some will regret that Bagehot did not go to Oxford; the reason being that his father, who was a Unitarian, objected on principle to all doctrinal tests, and would never have permitted a son of his to go

to either of the older Universities while those tests were required of the undergraduates. And I am not at all sure that University College, London, was not at that time a much more awakening place of education for young men than almost any Oxford college. Bagehot himself, I suspect, thought so. Fifteen years later he wrote, in his essay on Shelley: "A distinguished pupil of the University of Oxford once observed to us, 'The use of the University of Oxford is that no one can over-read himself there. The appetite for knowledge is repressed.'" And whatever may have been defective in University College, London—and no doubt much was defective—nothing of the kind could have been said of it when we were students there. Indeed, in those years London was a place with plenty of intellectual stimulus in it for young men, while in University College itself there was quite enough vivacious and original teaching to make that stimulus available to the full. It is sometimes said that it needs the quiet of a country town remote from the capital to foster the love of genuine study in young men. But of this, at least, I am sure, that Gower Street, and Oxford Street, and the New Road, and the dreary chain of squares from Euston to Bloomsbury, were the scenes of discussions as eager and as abstract as ever were the sedate cloisters or the flowery river-meadows of Cambridge or Oxford. Once, I remember, in the vehemence of our argument as to whether the so-called logical principle of identity (A is A) were entitled to rank as "a law of thought" or only as a postulate of language, Bagehot and I wandered up and down Regent Street for something like two hours in the vain attempt to find Oxford Street:—

"And yet what days were those, Parmenides,
When we were young, when we could number friends
In all the Italian cities like ourselves,
When with elated hearts we joined your train,
Ye sun-born virgins, on the road of truth!
Then we could still enjoy, then neither thought
Nor outward things were closed and dead to us,
But we received the shock of mighty thoughts
On single minds with a pure natural joy;
And if the sacred load oppressed our brain,
We had the power to feel the pressure eased,
The brow unbound, the thoughts flow free again
In the delightful commerce of the world."[1]

Bagehot has himself described, evidently from his own experience, the kind of life we lived in those days, in an article on Oxford Reform: "So, too, in youth, the real plastic energy is not in tutors, or lectures, or in books 'got up,' but in Wordsworth and Shelley, in the books that all read because all like; in what all talk of because all are interested; in the argumentative walk or disputatious lounge; in the impact of young thought upon young thought, of fresh thought on fresh thought, of hot thought on hot thought; in mirth and refutation, in ridicule and laughter; for these are the free play of the natural mind, and these cannot be got without a college".[2]

The late Professor Sewell, when asked to give his pupils some clear conception of the old Greek Sophists, is said to have replied that he could not do this better than by referring them to the Professors of University College, London. I do not think there was much force in the sarcasm, for though Professor T. Hewitt Key,

[1] Matthew Arnold.

[2] *Prospective Review*, No. 31, for August, 1852. Reprinted in this work, vol. iii., p. 101.

whose restless and ingenious mind led him many a wild dance after etymological Will-o'-the-wisps—I remember, for instance, his cheerfully accepting the suggestion that "better" and "bad" (*melior* and *malus*) came from the same root, and accounting for it by the probable disposition of hostile tribes to call everything bad which their enemies called good, and everything good which their enemies called bad—may have had in him much of the brilliance, and something also, perhaps, of the flightiness, of the old sophist, it would be hard to imagine men more severe in exposing pretentious conceits and dispelling dreams of theoretic omniscience, than Professors De Morgan, Malden, and Long. De Morgan, who at that time was in the midst of his controversy on formal logic with Sir William Hamilton, was, indeed, characterised by the great Edinburgh metaphysician as "profound in mathematics, curious in logic, but wholly deficient in architectonic power"; yet, for all that, his lectures on the Theory of Limits were a far better logical discipline for young men than Sir William Hamilton's on the Law of the Unconditioned or the Quantification of the Predicate. Professor Malden contrived to imbue us with a love of that fastidious taste and that exquisite nicety in treating questions of scholarship, which has, perhaps, been more needed and less cultivated in Gower Street than any other of the higher elements of a college education; while Professor Long's caustic irony, accurate and almost ostentatiously dry learning, and profoundly stoical temperament, were as antithetic to the temper of the sophist as human qualities could possibly be.

The time of our college life was pretty nearly con-

temporaneous with the life of the Anti-Corn-Law League and the great agitation in favour of Free-trade. To us this was useful rather from the general impulse it gave to political discussion, and the literary curiosity it excited in us as to the secret of true eloquence, than because it anticipated in any considerable degree the later acquired taste for economical science. Bagehot and I seldom missed an opportunity of hearing together the matchless practical disquisitions of Mr. Cobden—lucid and homely, yet glowing with intense conviction,—the profound passion and careless, though artistic, scorn of Mr. Bright, and the artificial and elaborately ornate periods, and witty, though somewhat *ad captandum*, epigrams of Mr. W. J. Fox (afterwards M.P. for Oldham). Indeed, we scoured London together to hear any kind of oratory that had gained a reputation of its own, and compared all we heard with the declamation of Burke and the rhetoric of Macaulay, many of whose later essays came out and were eagerly discussed by us while we were together at college. In our conversations on these essays, I remember that I always bitterly attacked, while Bagehot moderately defended, the glorification of compromise which marks all Macaulay's writings. Even in early youth Bagehot had much of that "animated moderation" which he praises so highly in his latest work. He was a voracious reader, especially of history, and had a far truer appreciation of historical conditions than most young thinkers; indeed, the broad historical sense which characterised him from first to last, made him more alive than ordinary students to the urgency of circumstance, and far less disposed to indulge in abstract moral criticism from a modern point of view.

On theology, as on all other subjects, Bagehot was at this time more conservative than myself, he sharing his mother's orthodoxy, and I at that time accepting heartily the Unitarianism of my own people. Theology was, however, I think, the only subject on which, in later life, we, to some degree at least, exchanged places, though he never at any time, however doubtful he may have become on some of the cardinal issues of historical Christianity, accepted the Unitarian position. Indeed, within the last two or three years of his life, he spoke on one occasion of the Trinitarian doctrine as probably the best account which human reason could render of the mystery of the self-existent mind.

In those early days Bagehot's manner was often supercilious. We used to attack him for his intellectual arrogance—his *ὕβρις* we called it, in our college slang —a quality which I believe was not really in him, though he had then much of its external appearance. Nevertheless his genuine contempt for what was intellectually feeble was not accompanied by an even adequate appreciation of his own powers. At college, however, his satirical "Hear, hear," was a formidable sound in the debating society, and one which took the heart out of many a younger speaker; and the ironical "How much?" with which in conversation he would meet an over-eloquent expression, was always of a nature to reduce a man, as the mathematical phrase goes, to his "lowest terms". In maturer life he became much gentler and mellower, and often even delicately considerate for others; but his inner scorn for ineffectual thought remained, in some degree, though it was very reticently expressed, to the last. For instance, I re-

member his attacking me for my mildness in criticising a book which, though it professed to rest on a basis of clear thought, really missed all its points. "There is a pale, whitey-brown substance," he wrote to me, "in the man's books, which people who don't think take for thought, but it isn't;" and he upbraided me much for not saying plainly that the man was a muff. In his youth this scorn for anything like the vain beating of the wings in the attempt to think, was at its maximum. It was increased, I think, by that which was one of his greatest qualities, his remarkable "detachment" of mind—in other words, his comparative inaccessibility to the contagion of blind sympathy. Most men, more or less unconsciously, shrink from even *thinking* what they feel to be out of sympathy with the feelings of their neighbours, unless under some strong incentive to do so; and in this way the sources of much true and important criticism are dried up, through the mere diffusion and ascendency of conventional but sincere habits of social judgment. And no doubt for the greater number of us this is much the best. We are worth more for the purpose of constituting and strengthening the cohesive power of the social bond, than we should ever be worth for the purpose of criticising feebly—and with little effect, perhaps, except the disorganising effect of seeming ill-nature—the various incompetences and miscarriages of our neighbours' intelligence. But Bagehot's intellect was always far too powerful and original to render him available for the function of mere social cement; and full as he was of genuine kindness and hearty personal affections, he certainly had not in any high degree that sensitive instinct as to what others

would feel, which so often shapes even the thoughts of men, and still oftener their speech, into mild and complaisant, but unmeaning and unfruitful, forms.

Thus it has been said that in his very amusing article on Crabb Robinson, published in the *Fortnightly Review* for August, 1869, he was more than a little rough in his delineation of that quaint old friend of our earlier days. And certainly there is something of the naturalist's realistic manner of describing the habits of a new species, in the paper, though there is not a grain of malice or even depreciatory bias in it, and though there is a very sincere regard manifested throughout. But that essay will illustrate admirably what I mean by saying that Bagehot's detachment of mind, and the deficiency in him of any aptitude for playing the part of mere social cement, tended to give the impression of an intellectual arrogance which—certainly in the sense of self-esteem or self-assertion—did not in the least belong to him. In the essay I have just mentioned he describes how Crabb Robinson, when he gave his somewhat famous breakfast-parties, used to forget to make the tea, then lost his keys, then told a long story about a bust of Wieland, during the extreme agony of his guests' appetites, and finally, perhaps, withheld the cup of tea he had at last poured out, while he regaled them with a poem of Wordsworth's or a diatribe against Hazlitt. And Bagehot adds: "The more astute of his guests used to breakfast before they came, and then there was much interest in seeing a steady literary man, who did not understand the region, in agonies at having to hear three stories before he got his tea, one again between his milk and his sugar, another between his butter and

his toast, and additional zest in making a stealthy inquiry that was sure to intercept the coming delicacies by bringing on Schiller and Goethe". The only "astute" person referred to was, I imagine, Bagehot himself, who confessed to me, much to my amusement, that this was always his own precaution before one of Crabb Robinson's breakfasts. I doubt if anybody else ever thought of it. It was very characteristic in him that he should have not only noticed—for that, of course, any one might do—this weak element in Crabb Robinson's breakfasts, but should have kept it so distinctly before his mind as to make it the centre, as it were, of a policy, and the opportunity of a mischievous stratagem to try the patience of others. It showed how much of the social naturalist there was in him. If any race of animals could understand a naturalist's account of their ways and habits, and of the devices he adopted to get those ways and habits more amusingly or instructively displayed before him, no doubt they would think that he was a cynic; and it was this intellectual detachment, as of a social naturalist, from the society in which he moved, which made Bagehot's remarks often seem somewhat harsh, when, in fact, they were animated not only by no suspicion of malice, but by the most cordial and earnest friendliness. Owing to this separateness of mind, he described more strongly and distinctly traits which, when delineated by a friend, we expect to find painted in the softened manner of one who is half disposed to imitate or adopt them.

Yet, though I have used the word "naturalist" to denote the keen and solitary observation with which Bagehot watched society, no word describes him worse.

if we attribute to it any of that coldness and stillness of curiosity which we are apt to associate with scientific vigilance. Especially in his youth, buoyancy, vivacity, velocity of thought, were of the essence of the impression which he made. He had high spirits and great capacities for enjoyment, great sympathies indeed with the old English Cavalier. In his Essay on Macaulay he paints that character with profound sympathy:—

"What historian, indeed," he says, "has ever estimated the Cavalier character? There is Clarendon, the grave, rhetorical, decorous lawyer—piling words, congealing arguments—very stately, a little grim. There is Hume, the Scotch metaphysician, who has made out the best case for such people as never were, for a Charles who never died, for a Strafford who could never have been attainted, a saving, calculating North-countryman, fat, impassive, who lived on eightpence a day. What have these people to do with an enjoying English gentleman? . . . Talk of the ways of spreading a wholesome Conservatism throughout the country . . . . as far as communicating and establishing your creed is concerned, try a little pleasure. The way to keep up old customs is to enjoy old customs; the way to be satisfied with the present state of things is to enjoy that state of things. Over the 'Cavalier' mind this world passes with a thrill of delight; there is an exultation in a daily event, zest in the 'regular thing,' joy at an old feast."[1]

And that aptly represents himself. Such arrogance as he seemed to have in early life was the arrogance as much of enjoyment as of detachment of mind—the *insouciance* of the old Cavalier as much at least as the calm of a mind not accessible to the contagion of social feelings. He always talked, in youth, of his spirits as inconveniently high; and once wrote to me that he did not think they were quite as "boisterous" as they had been, and that his fellow-creatures were not sorry for the abatement; nevertheless, he added, "I am quite

[1] See vol. ii., p. 12, of this work.

fat, gross, and ruddy". He was, indeed, excessively fond of hunting, vaulting, and almost all muscular effort, so that his life would be wholly misconceived by any one who, hearing of his "detachment" of thought, should picture his mind as a vigilantly observant, far-away intelligence, such as Hawthorne's, for example. He liked to be in the thick of the *mêlée* when talk grew warm, though he was never so absorbed in it as not to keep his mind cool.

As I said, Bagehot was a Somersetshire man, with all the richness of nature and love for the external glow of life which the most characteristic counties of the South-west of England contrive to give to their most characteristic sons:—

"This north-west corner of Spain," he wrote once to a newspaper from the Pyrenees, "is the only place out of England where I should like to live. It is a sort of better Devonshire; the coast is of the same kind, the sun is more brilliant, the sea is more brilliant, and there are mountains in the background. I have seen some more beautiful places and many grander, but I should not like to live in them. As Mr. Emerson puts it, 'I do not want to go to heaven before my time'. My English nature by early use and long habit is tied to a certain kind of scenery, soon feels the want of it, and is apt to be alarmed as well as pleased at perpetual snow and all sorts of similar beauties. But here, about San Sebastian, you have the best England can give you (at least if you hold, as I do, that Devonshire is the finest of our counties), and the charm, the ineffable, indescribable charm of the South too. Probably the sun has some secret effect on the nervous system that makes one inclined to be pleased, but the golden light lies upon everything, and one fancies that one is charmed only by the outward loveliness."

The vivacity and warm colouring of the landscapes of the South of England certainly had their full share in moulding his tastes, and possibly even his style.

Bagehot took the mathematical scholarship with his

Bachelor's degree in the University of London in 1846, and the gold medal in Intellectual and Moral Philosophy with his Master's degree in 1848, in reading for which he mastered for the first time those principles of political economy which were to receive so much illustration from his genius in later years. But at this time philosophy, poetry, and theology had, I think, a much greater share of his attention than any narrow and more sharply defined science. Shakespeare, Keats, Shelley and Wordsworth, Coleridge, Martineau and John Henry Newman, all in their way exerted a great influence over his mind, and divided, not unequally, with the authors whom he was bound to study—that is, the Greek philosophers, together with Hume, Kant, J. S. Mill, and Sir William Hamilton—the time at his disposal. I have no doubt that for seven or eight years of his life the Roman Catholic Church had a great fascination for his imagination, though I do not think that he was ever at all near conversion. He was intimate with all Dr. Newman's writings. And of these the Oxford sermons, and the poems in the *Lyra Apostolica* afterwards separately published—partly, I believe, on account of the high estimate of them which Bagehot had himself expressed—were always his special favourites. The little poetry he wrote—and it is evident that he never had the kind of instinct for, or command of, language which is the first condition of genuine poetic genius—seems to me to have been obviously written under the spell which Dr. Newman's own few but finely-chiselled poems had cast upon him. If I give one specimen of Bagehot's poems, it is not that I think it in any way an adequate expression of his powers, but for a very different

reason, because it will show those who have inferred from his other writings that his mind never deeply concerned itself with religion, how great is their mistake. Nor is there any real poverty of resource in these lines, except perhaps in the awkward mechanism of some of them. They were probably written when he was twenty-three or twenty-four.

"To the Roman Catholic Church.

"'Casta inceste.'—*Lucretius.*

"Thy lamp of faith is brightly trimmed,
Thy eager eye is not yet dimmed,
Thy stalwart step is yet unstayed,
Thy words are well obeyed.

"Thy proud voice vaunts of strength from heaven,
Thy proud foes carp, 'By hell's art given':
No Titan thou of earth-born bands,
Strange Church of hundred hands.

"Nursed without knowledge, born of night,
With hand of power and thoughts of light,
As Britain seas, far-reachingly
O'er-rul'st thou history.

"Wild as La Pucelle in her hour,
O'er prostrate realms with awe-girt power
Thou marchest steadfast on thy path
Through wonder, love, and wrath.

"And will thy end be such as hers,
O'erpowered by earthly mail-clad powers,
Condemned for cruel, magic art,
Though awful, bold of heart

"Through thorn-clad Time's unending waste
With ardent step alone thou strayest,
As Jewish scape-goats tracked the wild,
Unholy, consecrate, defiled.

"Use not thy truth in manner rude
To rule for gain the multitude,
Or thou wilt see that truth depart,
To seek some holier heart;

"Then thou wilt watch thy errors lorn,
O'erspread by shame, o'erswept by scorn,
In lonely want without hope's smile,
As Tyre her weed-clad Isle.

"Like once thy chief, thou bear'st Christ's name;
Like him thou hast denied his shame,
Bold, eager, skilful, confident,
Oh, now like him repent!"

That has certainly no sign of the hand of the master in it, for the language is not moulded and vivified by the thought, but the thought itself is fine. And there is still better evidence than these lines would afford, of the fascination which the Roman Catholic Church had for Bagehot. A year or two later, in the letters on the *coup d'état*, to which I shall soon have to refer, there occurs the following passage. (He is trying to explain how the cleverness, the moral restlessness, and intellectual impatience of the French, all tend to unfit them for a genuine Parliamentary government):—

"I do not know that I can exhibit the way these qualities of the French character operate on their opinions better than by telling you how the Roman Catholic Church deals with them. I have rather attended to it since I came here. It gives sermons almost an interest, their being in French, and to those curious in intellectual matters, it is worth observing. In other times, and even now in out-of-the-way Spain, I suppose it may be true that the Catholic Church has been opposed to inquiry and reasoning. But it is not so now and here. Loudly from the pens of a hundred writers, from the tongues of a thousand pulpits, in every note of thrilling scorn and exulting derision, she proclaims the contrary. Be she Christ's workman or Antichrist's, she knows her work too well. 'Reason, reason, reason!' exclaims she to the philosophers of this world. 'Put in practice what you teach if you would have others

believe it. Be consistent. Do not prate to us of private judgment, when you are but yourselves repeating what you heard in the nursery, ill-mumbled remnants of a Catholic tradition. No; exemplify what you command; inquire and make search. Seek, and we warn ye that ye will never find, yet do as ye will. Shut yourselves up in a room, make your mind a blank, go down (as you speak) into the depth of your consciousness, scrutinise the mental structure, inquire for the elements of belief,—spend years, your best years, in the occupation,—and, at length, when your eyes are dim, and your brain hot, and your hands unsteady, then reckon what you have gained. See if you cannot count on your fingers the certainties you have reached; reflect which of them you doubted yesterday, which you may disbelieve to-morrow; or, rather, make haste—assume at random some essential *credenda*,—write down your inevitable postulates, enumerate your necessary axioms, toil on, toil on, spin your spider's web, adore your own soul, or, if ye prefer it, choose some German nostrum; try an intellectual intuition, or the pure reason, or the intelligible ideas, or the mesmeric clairvoyance, and when so, or somehow, you have attained your results, try them on mankind. Don't go out into the byeways and hedges; it is unnecessary. Ring a bell, call in the servants, give them a course of lectures, cite Aristotle, review Descartes, panegyrise Plato, and see if the *bonne* will understand you. It is you that say *Vox populi, vox Dei.* You see the people reject you. Or, suppose you succeed,—what you call succeeding. Your books are read; for three weeks, or even a season, you are the idol of the *salons.* Your hard words are on the lips of women; then a change comes—a new actress appears at the Théâtre Français or the Opera; her charms eclipse your theories; or a great catastrophe occurs; political liberty, it is said, is annihilated. *Il faut se faire mouchard*, is the observation of scoffers. Anyhow you are forgotten. Fifty years may be the gestation of a philosophy, not three its life. Before long, before you go to your grave, your six disciples leave you for some newer master, or to set up for themselves. The poorest priest in the remotest region of the Basses-Alpes has more power over men's souls than human cultivation. His ill-mouthed masses move women's souls—can you? Ye scoff at Jupiter, yet he at least was believed in, you have never been. Idol for idol, the *de*throned is better than the *un*throned. No, if you would reason, if you would teach, if you would speculate,—come to us. We have our premises ready; years upon years before you were born, intellects whom the best of you delight to magnify, toiled to systematise the creed of ages. Years upon years after you are dead, better heads than yours will find new matter there to define, to

divide, to arrange. Consider the hundred volumes of Aquinas. Which of you desire a higher life than that;—to deduce, to subtilise, discriminate, systematise, and decide the highest truth, and to be believed? Yet such was his luck, his enjoyment. He was what you would be. No, no, *credite*, *credite*. Ours is the life of speculation. The cloister is the home for the student. Philosophy is stationary, Catholicism progressive. *You* call. *We* are heard, etc.' So speaks each preacher, according to his ability. And when the dust and noise of present controversies have passed away, and, in the interior of the night, some grave historian writes out the tale of half-forgotten times, let him not forget to observe that, profoundly as the mediæval Church subdued the superstitious cravings of a painful and barbarous age, in after-years she dealt more discerningly still with the feverish excitement, the feeble vanities, and the dogmatic impatience of an over-intellectual generation." [1]

It is obvious, I think, both from the poem, and from these reflections, that what attracted Bagehot in the Church of Rome was the historical prestige and social authority which she had accumulated in believing and uncritical ages for use in the unbelieving and critical age in which we live,—while what he condemned and dreaded in her was her tendency to use her power over the multitude for purposes of a low ambition.

And as I am on this subject, this will be, I think, the best opportunity I shall have to say what I have got to say of Bagehot's later religious belief, without returning to it when I have to deal with a period in which the greatest part of his spare intellectual energy was given to other subjects. I do not think that the religious affections were very strong in Bagehot's mind, but the primitive religious instincts certainly were. From childhood he was what he certainly remained to the last, in spite of the rather antagonistic influence of the able, scientific group of men from whom he learned so much

[1] See "Letters on the Coup d'État of 1851," vol. iii., p. 38.

—a thorough transcendentalist, by which I mean one who could never doubt that there was a real foundation of the universe distinct from the outward show of its superficial qualities, and that the substance is never exhaustively expressed in these qualities. He often repeats in his essays Shelley's fine line, "Lift not the painted veil which those who live call life," and the essence at least of the idea in it haunted him from his very childhood. In the essay on "Hartley Coleridge"—perhaps the most perfect in style of any of his writings—he describes most powerfully, and evidently in great measure from his own experience, the mysterious confusion between appearances and realities which so bewildered little Hartley,—the difficulty that he complained of in distinguishing between the various Hartleys,—"picture Hartley," "shadow Hartley," and between Hartley the subject and Hartley the object, the enigmatic blending of which last two Hartleys the child expressed by catching hold of his own arm, and then calling himself the "catch-me-fast Hartley". And in dilating on this bewildering experience of the child's, Bagehot borrows from his own recollections:—

"All children have a world of their own, as distinct from that of the grown people who gravitate around them, as the dreams of girlhood from our prosaic life, or the ideas of the kitten that plays with the falling leaves, from those of her carnivorous mother that catches mice, and is sedulous in her domestic duties. But generally about this interior existence children are dumb. You have warlike ideas, but you cannot say to a sinewy relative, 'My dear aunt, I wonder when the big bush in the garden will begin to walk about; I'm sure it's a Crusader, and I was cutting it all the day with my steel sword. But what do you think, aunt? for I'm puzzled about its legs, because you see, aunt, it has only *one* stalk—and besides, aunt, the leaves.' You cannot remark this in secular life, but you hack at the infelicitous bush till you do not wholly

reject the idea that your small garden is Palestine, and yourself the most adventurous of knights." [1]

They have a tradition in the family that this is but a fragment from Bagehot's own imaginative childhood, and certainly this visionary element in him was very vivid to the last. However, the transcendental or intellectual basis of religious belief was soon strengthened in him, as readers of his remarkable paper on Bishop Butler will easily see, by those moral and retributive instincts which warn us of the meaning and consequences of guilt:—

"The moral principle," he wrote in that essay, "whatever may be said to the contrary by complacent thinkers, is really and to most men a principle of fear. . . . Conscience is the condemnation of ourselves; we expect a penalty. As the Greek proverb teaches, 'Where there is shame, there is fear'. . . . How to be free from this is the question. How to get loose from this—how to be rid of the secret tie which binds the strong man and cramps his pride, and makes him angry at the beauty of the universe, which will not let him go forth like a great animal, like the king of the forest, in the glory of his might, but which restrains him with an inner fear and a secret foreboding that if he do but exalt himself he shall be abased, if he do but set forth his own dignity he will offend ONE who will deprive him of it. This, as has often been pointed out, is the source of the bloody rites of heathendom." [2]

And then, after a powerful passage, in which he describes the sacrificial superstitions of men like Achilles, he returns, with a flash of his own peculiar humour, to Bishop Butler, thus:—

"Of course it is not this kind of fanaticism that we impute to a prelate of the English Church; human sacrifices are not respectable, and Achilles was not rector of Stanhope. But though the costume and circumstances of life change, the human heart does not; its feelings remain. The same anxiety, the same consciousness of personal sin,

[1] See vol. i., p. 3. [2] See vol. iii., p. 116.

which lead, in barbarous times, to what has been described, show themselves in civilised life as well. In this quieter period, their great manifestation is scrupulosity;" [1]

which he goes on to describe as a sort of inexhaustible anxiety for perfect compliance with the minutest positive commands which may be made the condition of forgiveness for the innumerable lapses of moral obligation. I am not criticising the paper, or I should point out that Bagehot failed in it to draw out the distinction between the primitive moral instinct and the corrupt superstition into which it runs; but I believe that he recognised the weight of this moral testimony of the conscience to a divine Judge, as well as the transcendental testimony of the intellect to an eternal substance of things, to the end of his life. And certainly in the reality of human free-will as the condition of all genuine moral life, he firmly believed. In his *Physics and Politics*—the subtle and original essay upon which, in conjunction with the essay on the English Constitution, Bagehot's reputation as a European thinker chiefly rests—he repeatedly guards himself (for instance, pp. 9, 10) against being supposed to think that in accepting the principle of evolution, he has accepted anything inconsistent either with spiritual creation, or with the free-will of man. On the latter point he adds:—

"No doubt the modern doctrine of the 'conservation of force,' if applied to decision, is inconsistent with free-will; if you hold that force is 'never lost or gained,' you cannot hold that there is a real gain, a sort of new creation of it in free volition. But I have nothing to do here with the universal 'conservation of force'. The conception of the nervous organs as stores of will-made power, does not raise or need so vast a discussion." [2]

[1] See vol. iii., p. 117. [2] *Physics and Politics*, p. 10.

And in the same book he repeatedly uses the expression "Providence," evidently in its natural meaning, to express the ultimate force at work behind the march of "evolution". Indeed, in conversation with me on this subject, he often said how much higher a conception of the creative mind, the new Darwinian ideas seemed to him to have introduced, as compared with those contained in what is called the argument from contrivance and design. On the subject of personal immortality, too, I do not think that Bagehot ever wavered. He often spoke, and even wrote, of "that vague sense of eternal continuity which is always about the mind, and which no one could bear to lose," and described it as being much more important to us than it even appears to be, important as that is; for, he said, "when we think we are thinking of the past, we are only thinking of a future that is to be like it". But with the exception of these cardinal points, I could hardly say how much Bagehot's mind was or was not affected by the great speculative controversies of later years. Certainly he became much more doubtful concerning the force of the historical evidence of Christianity than I ever was, and rejected, I think, entirely, though on what amount of personal study he had founded his opinion I do not know, the Apostolic origin of the fourth Gospel. Possibly his mind may have been latterly in suspense as to miracle altogether, though I am pretty sure that he had not come to a negative conclusion. He belonged, in common with myself, during the last years of his life, to a society in which these fundamental questions were often discussed; but he seldom spoke in it, and told me very shortly before his death that he shrank from such

discussions on religious points, feeling that, in debates of this kind, they were not and could not be treated with anything like thoroughness. On the whole, I think, the cardinal article of his faith would be adequately represented even in the latest period of his life by the following passage in his essay on Bishop Butler:—

"In every step of religious argument we require the assumption, the belief, the faith, if the word is better, in an absolutely *perfect* Being; in and by whom we are, who is omnipotent as well as most holy; who moves on the face of the whole world, and ruleth all things by the word of his power. If we grant this, the difficulty of the opposition between what is here called the natural and the supernatural religion is removed; and without granting it, that difficulty is perhaps insuperable. It follows from the very idea and definition of an infinitely perfect Being, that he is within us as well as without us,—ruling the clouds of the air and the fishes of the sea, as well as the fears and thoughts of men; smiling through the smile of nature as well as warning with the pain of conscience,—'sine qualitate, bonum; sine quantitate, magnum; sine indigentiâ, creatorem; sine situ, præsidentem; sine habitu, omnia continentem; sine loco, ubique totum; sine tempore, sempiternum; sine ullâ sui mutatione, mutabilia facientem, nihilque patientem'. If we assume this, life is simple; without this, all is dark." [1]

Evidently, then, though Bagehot held that the doctrine of evolution by natural selection gave a higher conception of the Creator than the old doctrine of mechanical design, he never took any materialistic view of evolution. One of his early essays, written while at college, on some of the many points of the Kantian philosophy which he then loved to discuss, concluded with a remarkable sentence, which would probably have fairly expressed, even at the close of his life, his profound belief in God, and his partial sympathy with the agnostic view that we are, in great measure, incapable of appre-

[1] Vol. iii., p. 122.

hending, more than very dimly, His mind or purposes:—"Gazing after the infinite essence, we are like men watching through the drifting clouds for a glimpse of the true heavens on a drear November day; layer after layer passes from our view, but still the same immovable grey rack remains".

After Bagehot had taken his Master's degree, and while he was still reading Law in London, and hesitating between the Bar and the family bank, there came as Principal to University Hall (which is a hall of residence in connection with University College, London, established by the Presbyterians and Unitarians after the passing of the Dissenters' Chapel Act), the man who had, I think, a greater intellectual fascination for Bagehot than any of his contemporaries—Arthur Hugh Clough, Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford, and author of various poems of great genius, more or less familiar to the public, though Clough is perhaps better known as the subject of the exquisite poem written on his death in 1861, by his friend Matthew Arnold—the poem to which he gave the name of "Thyrsis"—than by even the most popular of his own. Bagehot had subscribed for the erection of University Hall, and took an active part at one time on its council. Thus he saw a good deal of Clough, and did what he could to mediate between that enigma to Presbyterian parents—a college-head who held himself serenely neutral on almost all moral and educational subjects interesting to parents and pupils, except the observance of disciplinary rules—and the managing body who bewildered him and were by him bewildered. I don't think either Bagehot or Clough's other friends were very successful in their

mediation, but he at least gained in Clough a cordial friend, and a theme of profound intellectual and moral interest to himself which lasted him his life, and never failed to draw him into animated discussion long after Clough's own premature death; and I think I can trace the effect which some of Clough's writings had on Bagehot's mind to the very end of his career. There were some points of likeness between Bagehot and Clough, but many more of difference. Both had the capacity for boyish spirits in them, and the florid colour which usually accompanies a good deal of animal vigour; both were reserved men, with a great dislike of anything like the appearance of false sentiment, and both were passionate admirers of Wordsworth's poetry; but Clough was slightly lymphatic, with a great tendency to unexpressed and unacknowledged discouragement, and to the paralysis of silent embarrassment when suffering from such feelings, while Bagehot was keen, and very quickly evacuated embarrassing positions, and never returned to them. When, however, Clough was happy and at ease, there was a calm and silent radiance in his face, and his head was set with a kind of stateliness on his shoulders, that gave him almost an Olympian air; but this would sometimes vanish in a moment into an embarrassed taciturnity that was quite uncouth. One of his friends declares that the man who was said to be "a cross between a schoolboy and a bishop," must have been like Clough. There was in Clough, too, a large Chaucerian simplicity and a flavour of homeliness, so that now and then, when the light shone into his eyes, there was something, in spite of the air of fine scholarship and culture, which reminded

one of the best likenesses of Burns. It was of Clough, I believe, that Emerson was thinking (though, knowing Clough intimately as he did, he was of course speaking mainly in joke) when he described the Oxford of that day thus: "'Ah,' says my languid Oxford gentleman, 'nothing new, and nothing true, and no matter'". No saying could misrepresent Clough's really buoyant and simple character more completely than that; but doubtless many of his sayings and writings, treating, as they did, most of the greater problems of life as insoluble, and enjoining a self-possessed composure under the discovery of their insolubility, conveyed an impression very much like this to men who came only occasionally in contact with him. Bagehot, in his article on Crabb Robinson, says that the latter, who in those days seldom remembered names, always described Clough as "that admirable and accomplished man—you know whom I mean—the one who never says anything". And certainly Clough was often taciturn to the last degree, or if he opened his lips, delighted to open them only to scatter confusion by discouraging, in words at least, all that was then called earnestness—as, for example, by asking: "Was it ordained that twice two should make four, simply for the intent that boys and girls should be cut to the heart that they do not make five? Be content; when the veil is raised, perhaps they will make five! Who knows?"[1]

Clough's chief fascination for Bagehot was, I think, that he had as a poet in some measure rediscovered, at all events realised, as few ever realised before, the enormous difficulty of finding truth—a difficulty which

[1] *Poems and Prose Remains of Arthur Hugh Clough*, vol. i., p. 175.

he somewhat paradoxically held to be enhanced rather than diminished by the intensity of the truest modern passion for it. The stronger the desire, he teaches, the greater is the danger of illegitimately satisfying that desire by persuading ourselves that what we *wish* to believe, is true, and the greater the danger of ignoring the actual confusions of human things:—

> "Rules baffle instincts, instincts rules,
> Wise men are bad, and good are fools,
> Facts evil, wishes vain appear,
> We cannot go, why are we here?
>
> "Oh, may we, for assurance' sake,
> Some arbitrary judgment take,
> And wilfully pronounce it clear,
> For this or that 'tis, we are here?
>
> "Or is it right, and will it do
> To pace the sad confusion through,
> And say, it does not yet appear
> What we shall be—what we are here?"

This warning to withhold judgment and not cheat ourselves into beliefs which our own imperious desire to believe had alone engendered, is given with every variety of tone and modulation, and couched in all sorts of different forms of fancy and apologue, throughout Clough's poems. He insists on "the *ruinous* force of the will" to persuade us of illusions which please us; of the tendency of practical life to give us beliefs which suit that practical life, but are none the truer for that; and is never weary of warning us that a firm belief in a falsity can be easily generated:—

> "*Action will furnish belief*,—but will that belief be the true one?
> This is the point, you know. However, it doesn't much matter.
> What one wants, I suppose, is to predetermine the action,
> So as to make it entail, not a chance belief, but the true one."

This practical preaching, which Clough urges in season and out of season, met an answering chord in Bagehot's mind, not so much in relation to religious belief as in relation to the over-haste and over-eagerness of human conduct, and I can trace the effect of it in all his writings, political and otherwise, to the end of his life. Indeed, it affected him much more in later days than in the years immediately following his first friendship with Clough. With all his boyish dash, there was something in Bagehot even in youth which dreaded precipitancy, and not only precipitancy itself, but those moral situations tending to precipitancy which men who have no minds of their own to make up, so often court. In later life he pleased himself by insisting that, on Darwin's principle, civilised men, with all the complex problems of modern life to puzzle them, suspend their judgment so little, and are so eager for action, only because they have inherited from the earlier, simpler, and more violent ages, an excessive predisposition to action unsuited to our epoch and dangerous to our future development. But it was Clough, I think, who first stirred in Bagehot's mind this great dread of "the ruinous force of the will," a phrase he was never weary of quoting, and which might almost be taken as the motto of his *Physics and Politics*, the great conclusion of which is that in the "age of discussion," grand policies and high-handed diplomacy and sensational legislation of all kinds will become rarer and rarer, because discussion will point out all the difficulties of such policies in relation to a state of existence so complex as our own, and will, in this way, tend to repress the excess of practical energy handed down to us by ancestors, to

whom life was a sharper, simpler, and more perilous affair.

But the time for Bagehot's full adoption of the suspensive principle in public affairs was not yet. In 1851 he went to Paris, shortly before the *coup d'état.* And while all England was assailing Louis Napoleon (justly enough, as I think) for his perfidy, and his impatience of the self-willed Assembly he could not control, Bagehot was preparing a deliberate and very masterly defence of that bloody and high-handed act. Even Bagehot would, I think, if pressed judiciously in later life, have admitted—though I can't say he ever *did*—that the *coup d'état* was one of the best illustrations of "the ruinous force of the will," in engendering, or at least crystallising, a false intellectual conclusion as to the political possibilities of the future, which recent history could produce. Certainly, he always spoke somewhat apologetically of these early letters, though I never heard him expressly retract their doctrine. In 1851 a knot of young Unitarians, of whom I was then one, headed by the late Mr. J. Langton Sanford—afterwards the historian of the Great Rebellion, who survived Bagehot barely four months—had engaged to help for a time in conducting the *Inquirer*, which then was, and still is, the chief literary and theological organ of the Unitarian body. Our *régime* was, I imagine, a time of great desolation for the very tolerant and thoughtful constituency for whom we wrote; and many of them, I am confident, yearned, and were fully justified in yearning, for those better days when this tyranny of ours should be overpast. Sanford and Osler did a good deal to throw cold water on the rather optimist and

philanthropic politics of the most sanguine, because the most benevolent and open-hearted, of Dissenters. Roscoe criticised their literary work from the point of view of a devotee of the Elizabethan poets; and I attempted to prove to them in distinct heads, first, that their laity ought to have the protection afforded by a liturgy against the arbitrary prayers of their ministers; and next, that at least the great majority of their sermons ought to be suppressed, and the habit of delivering them discontinued almost altogether. Only a denomination of "just men" trained in tolerance for generations, and in that respect, at least, made all but "perfect," would have endured it at all; but I doubt if any of us caused the Unitarian body so much grief as Bagehot, who never was a Unitarian, but who contributed a series of brilliant letters on the *coup d'état*, in which he trod just as heavily on the toes of his colleagues as he did on those of the public by whom the *Inquirer* was taken. In those days he not only, as I have already shown, eulogised the Catholic Church, but he supported the Prince-President's military violence, attacked the freedom of the Press in France, maintained that the country was wholly unfit for true Parliamentary government, and—worst of all, perhaps—insinuated a panegyric on Louis Napoleon himself, asserting that he had been far better prepared for the duties of a statesman by gambling on the turf, than he would have been by poring over the historical and political dissertations of the wise and the good. This was Bagehot's day of cynicism. The seven letters which he wrote on the *coup d'état* were certainly very exasperating, and yet they were not caricatures of his real thought, for his

private letters at the time were more cynical still. Crabb Robinson, in speaking of him, used ever afterwards to describe him to me as "that friend of yours—you know whom I mean, you rascal!—who wrote those abominable, those most disgraceful letters on the *coup d'état*—I did not forgive him for years after". Nor do I wonder, even now, that a sincere friend of constitutional freedom and intellectual liberty, like Crabb Robinson, found them difficult to forgive. They were light and airy, and even flippant, on a very grave subject. They made nothing of the Prince's perjury; and they took impertinent liberties with all the dearest prepossessions of the readers of the *Inquirer*, and assumed their sympathy just where Bagehot knew that they would be most revolted by his opinions. Nevertheless, they had a vast deal of truth in them, and no end of ability, and I hope that there will be many to read them with interest now that they are here republished. There is a good deal of the raw material of history in them, and certainly I doubt if Bagehot ever again hit the satiric vein of argument so well. Here is a passage that will bear taking out of its context, and therefore not so full of the shrewd malice of these letters as many others, but which will illustrate their ability. It is one in which Bagehot maintained for the first time the view (which I believe he subsequently almost persuaded English politicians to accept, though in 1852 it was a mere flippant novelty, a paradox, and a heresy) that free institutions are apt to succeed with a stupid people, and to founder with a ready-witted and vivacious one. After broaching this, he goes on:—

"I see you are surprised. You are going to say to me as Socrates

did to Polus, 'My young friend, *of course* you are right, but will you explain what you mean, as you are not yet intelligible?' I will do so as well as I can, and endeavour to make good what I say, not by an *a priori* demonstration of my own, but from the details of the present and the facts of history. Not to begin by wounding any present susceptibilities, let me take the Roman character, for, with one great exception—I need not say to whom I allude—they are the great political people of history. Now is not a certain dulness their most visible characteristic? What is the history of their speculative mind? A blank. What their literature? A copy. They have left not a single discovery in any abstract science, not a single perfect or well-formed work of high imagination. The Greeks, the perfection of human and accomplished genius, bequeathed to mankind the ideal forms of self-idolising art; the Romans imitated and admired. The Greeks explained the laws of nature; the Romans wondered and despised. The Greeks invented a system of numerals second only to that now in use; the Romans counted to the end of their days with the clumsy apparatus which we still call by their name. The Greeks made a capital and scientific calendar; the Romans began their month when the Pontifex Maximus happened to spy out the new moon. Throughout Latin literature this is the perpetual puzzle—Why are we free and they slaves?—we prætors and they barbers? Why do the stupid people always win and the clever people always lose? I need not say that in real sound stupidity the English people are unrivalled. You'll have more wit, and better wit, in an Irish street-row than would keep Westminster Hall in humour for five weeks. . . . These valuable truths are no discoveries of mine. They are familiar enough to people whose business it is to know them. Hear what a douce and aged attorney says of your peculiarly promising barrister. 'Sharp? Oh! yes, yes: he's too sharp by half. He isn't *safe*, not a minute, isn't that young man.' 'What style, sir,' asked of an East India Director some youthful aspirant for literary renown, 'is most to be preferred in the composition of official despatches?' 'My good fellow,' responded the ruler of Hindostan, 'the style *as we* like, is the Humdrum.'"[1]

The permanent value of these papers is due to the freshness of their impressions of the French capital, and their true criticisms of Parisian journalism and society; their perverseness consists in this, that Bagehot steadily

[1] See "Letters on the Coup d'État," vol. iii., pp. 28, 31.

ignored in them the distinction between the duty of resisting anarchy, and the assumption of the Prince-President that this could only be done by establishing his own dynasty, and deferring *sine die* that great constitutional experiment which is now once more, no thanks to him or his Government, on its trial; an experiment which, for anything we see, had at least as good a chance then as now, and under a firm and popular chief of the executive like Prince Louis, would probably have had a better chance then than it has now under MacMahon. I need hardly say that in later life Bagehot was by no means blind to the political shortcomings of Louis Napoleon's *régime*, as the article republished from the *Economist*, in the second appendix to this volume, sufficiently proves. Moreover, he rejoiced heartily in the moderation of the republican statesmen during the severe trials of the months which just preceded his own death, in 1877, and expressed his sincere belief—confirmed by the history of the last year and a half—that the existing Republic has every prospect of life and growth.

During that residence in Paris, Bagehot, though, as I have said, in a somewhat cynical frame of mind, was full of life and courage, and was beginning to feel his own genius, which perhaps accounts for the air of recklessness so foreign to him, which he never adopted either before or since. During the riots he was a good deal in the streets, and from a mere love of art helped the Parisians to construct some of their barricades, notwithstanding the fact that his own sympathy was with those who shot down the barricades, not with those who manned them. He climbed over the rails of

the Palais Royal on the morning of 2nd December to breakfast, and used to say that he was the only person who did breakfast there on that day. Victor Hugo is certainly wrong in asserting that no one expected Louis Napoleon to use force, and that the streets were as full as usual when the people were shot down, for the gates of the Palais Royal were shut quite early in the day. Bagehot was very much struck by the ferocious look of the Montagnards.

"Of late," he wrote to me, "I have been devoting my entire attention to the science of barricades, which I found amusing. They have systematised it in a way which is pleasing to the cultivated intellect. We had only one good day's fighting, and I naturally kept out of cannon-shot. But I took a quiet walk over the barricades in the morning, and superintended the construction of three with as much keenness as if I had been clerk of the works. You've seen lots, of course, at Berlin, but I should not think those Germans were up to a real Montagnard, who is the most horrible being to the eye I ever saw,—sallow, sincere, sour fanaticism, with grizzled moustaches, and a strong wish to shoot you rather than not. The Montagnards are a scarce commodity, the real race—only three or four, if so many, to a barricade. If you want a Satan any odd time, they'll do; only I hope that *he* don't believe in human brotherhood. It is not possible to respect any one who does, and I should be loth to confound the notion of *our* friend's solitary grandeur by supposing him to fraternise," etc. "I think M. Buonaparte is entitled to great praise. He has very good heels to his boots, and the French just want treading down, and nothing else—calm, cruel, business-like oppression, to take the dogmatic conceit out of their heads. The spirit of generalisation which, John Mill tells us, honourably distinguishes the French mind, has come to this, that every Parisian wants his head *tapped* in order to get the formulæ and nonsense out of it. And it would pay to perform the operation, for they are very clever on what is within the limit of their experience, and all that can be 'expanded' in terms of it, but beyond, it is all generalisation and folly. . . . So I am for any carnivorous government."

And again, in the same letter:—

"Till the Revolution came I had no end of trouble to find conversation, but now they'll talk against everybody, and against the President like mad—and they talk immensely well, and the language is like a razor, capital if you are skilful, but sure to cut you if you aren't. A fellow can talk German in crude forms, and I don't see it sounds any worse, but this stuff is horrid unless you get it *quite* right. A French lady made a striking remark to me: '*C'est une révolution qui a sauvé la France. Tous mes amis sont mis en prison.*' She was immensely delighted that such a pleasing way of saving her country had been found."

Of course the style of these familiar private letters conveys a gross caricature not only of Bagehot's maturer mind, but even of the judgment of the published letters, and I quote them only to show that at the time when he composed these letters on the *coup d'état*, Bagehot's mood was that transient mood of reckless youthful cynicism through which so many men of genius pass. I do not think he had at any time any keen sympathy with the multitude, *i.e.*, with masses of unknown men. And that he ever felt what has since then been termed "the enthusiasm of humanity," the sympathy with "the toiling millions of men sunk in labour and pain," he himself would strenuously have denied. Such sympathy, even when men really desire to feel it, is, indeed, very much oftener coveted than actually felt by men as a living motive; and I am not quite sure that Bagehot would have even wished to feel it. Nevertheless, he had not the faintest trace of real hardness about him towards people whom he knew and understood. He could not bear to give pain; and when, in rare cases by youthful inadvertence, he gave it needlessly, I have seen how much and what lasting vexation it caused him. Indeed, he was capable of great sacrifices to spare his friends but a little suffering.

It was, I think, during his stay in Paris that Bagehot

finally decided to give up the notion of practising at the Bar, and to join his father in the Somersetshire Bank and in his other business as a merchant and shipowner. This involved frequent visits to London and Liverpool, and Bagehot soon began to take a genuine interest in the larger issues of commerce, and maintained to the end that "business is much more amusing than pleasure". Nevertheless, he could not live without the intellectual life of London, and never stayed more than six weeks at a time in the country without finding some excuse for going to town; and long before his death he made his home there. Hunting was the only sport he really cared for. He was a dashing rider, and a fresh wind was felt blowing through his earlier literary efforts, as though he had been thinking in the saddle, an effect wanting in his later essays, where you see chiefly the calm analysis of a lucid observer. But most of the ordinary amusements of young people he detested. He used to say that he wished he could think balls *wicked*, being so stupid as they were, and all "the little blue and pink girls, so like each other," —a sentiment partly due, perhaps, to his extreme shortness of sight.

Though Bagehot never doubted the wisdom of his own decision to give up the law for the life of commerce, he thoroughly enjoyed his legal studies in his friend the late Mr. Justice Quain's chambers, and in those of the present Vice-Chancellor, Sir Charles Hall, and he learnt there a good deal that was of great use to him in later life. Moreover, in spite of his large capacity for finance and commerce, there were small difficulties in Bagehot's way as a banker and merchant, which he felt somewhat

keenly.[1] He was always absent-minded about *minutiæ*. For instance, to the last, he could not correct a proof well, and was sure to leave a number of small inaccuracies, harshnesses, and slipshodnesses in style, uncorrected. He declared at one time that he was wholly unable to "add up," and in his mathematical exercises in college he had habitually been inaccurate in trifles. I remember Professor Malden, on returning one of his Greek exercises, saying to him, with that curiously precise and emphatic articulation which made every remark of his go so much farther than that of our other lecturers: "Mr. Bagehot, you wage an internecine war with your aspirates"—not meaning, of course, that he ever left them out in pronunciation, but that he neglected to put them in in his written Greek. And to the last, even in his printed Greek quotations, the slips of this kind were always numerous. This habitual difficulty—due, I believe, to a preoccupied imagination—in attending to small details, made a banker's duties seem irksome and formidable to him at first; and even to the last, in his most effective financial papers, he would generally get some one else to look after the precise figures for him. But in spite of all this, and in spite of a real attraction for the study of law, he was sure that his head would not stand the hot Courts and heavy wigs which make the hot Courts hotter, or the night-work of a thriving barrister in case of success; and he was certainly quite right. Indeed, had he chosen the Bar, he would have had no leisure for those two or three remarkable books which have

[1] In a letter to me of this date, he says: "I write this in my father's counting-house. It is a queer life and takes much *will* doing the sums, but not more than I looked for. It *must* do anyhow."

made his reputation,—books which have been already translated into all the literary and some of the unliterary languages of Europe, and two of which are, I believe, used as text-books in some of the American Colleges.[1] Moreover, in all probability, his life would have been much shorter into the bargain. Soon after his return from Paris he devoted himself in earnest to banking and commerce, and also began that series of articles, first for the *Prospective* and then for the *National Review* (which latter periodical he edited in conjunction with me for several years), the most striking of which he republished in 1858, under the awkward and almost forbidding title of *Estimates of some Englishmen and Scotchmen*—a book which never attracted the attention it deserved, and which has been long out of print. In republishing most of these essays as I am now doing,—and a later volume[2] containing those essays on statesmen and politicians which are omitted from these volumes,—it is perhaps only fair to say that Bagehot in later life used to speak ill, much too ill, of his own early style. He used to declare that his early style affected him like the "jogging of a cart without springs over a very rough road," and no doubt in his earliest essays something abrupt and spasmodic may easily be detected. Still, this was all so inextricably mingled with flashes of insight and humour which could ill be spared, that I always protested against any notion of so revising the essays as to pare down their excrescences.

[1] Since the first edition of this work was published, the Oxford Board of Studies has made a text-book of Mr. Bagehot's *English Constitution* for that University, and his *Economic Studies* is a text-book in the University of Cambridge.

[2] *Biographical Studies.*

I have never understood the comparative failure of this volume of Bagehot's early essays; and a comparative failure it was, though I do not deny that, even at the time, it attracted much attention among the most accomplished writers of the day, and that I have been urged to republish it, as I am now doing, by many of the ablest men of my acquaintance. Obviously, as I have admitted, there are many faults of workmanship in it. Now and then the banter is forced. Often enough the style is embarrassed. Occasionally, perhaps, the criticism misses its mark, or is over-refined. But, taken as a whole, I hardly know any book that is such good reading, that has so much lucid vision in it, so much shrewd and curious knowledge of the world, so sober a judgment and so dashing a humour combined. Take this, for instance, out of the paper on "The First Edinburgh Reviewers," concerning the judgment passed by Lord Jeffrey on the poetry of Bagehot's favourite poet, Wordsworth[1]:—

"The world has given judgment. Both Mr. Wordsworth and Lord Jeffrey have received their rewards. The one had his own generation —the laughter of men, the applause of drawing-rooms, the concurrence of the crowd; the other, a succeeding age, the fond enthusiasm of secret students, the lonely rapture of lonely minds. And each has received according to his kind. If all cultivated men speak differently because of the existence of Wordsworth and Coleridge; if not a thoughtful English book has appeared for years without some trace for good or for evil of their influence; if sermon-writers subsist upon their thoughts; if 'sacred, poets thrive by translating their weaker portions into the speech of women; if, when all this is over, some sufficient part of their writing will ever be fitting food for wild musing and solitary meditation, surely this is because they possessed the inner nature—an 'intense and glowing mind'—'the vision and the faculty divine'. But if, perchance, in their weaker

[1] *Biographical Studies.*

moments the great authors of the Lyrical ballads did ever imagine that the world was to pause because of their verses, that 'Peter Bell' would be popular in drawing-rooms, that 'Christabel' would be perused in the City, that people of fashion would make a hand-book of the *Excursion*, it was well for them to be told at once that it was not so. Nature ingeniously prepared a shrill artificial voice, which spoke in season and out of season, enough and more than enough, what will ever be the idea of the cities of the plain concerning those who live alone among the mountains; of the frivolous concerning the grave; of the gregarious concerning the recluse; of those who laugh concerning those who laugh not; of the common concerning the uncommon; of those who lend on usury concerning those who lend not; the notions of the world, of those whom it not will reckon among the righteous. It said, 'This won't do'. And so in all times will the lovers of polished Liberalism speak concerning the intense and lonely 'prophet'." [1]

I choose that passage because it illustrates so perfectly Bagehot's double vein, his sympathy with the works of high imagination, and his clear insight into that busy life which does not and cannot take note of works of high imagination, and which would not do the work it does, if it could. And this is the characteristic of all the essays. How admirably, for instance, in his essay on Shakespeare, does he draw out the individuality of a poet who is generally supposed to be so completely hidden in his plays; and with how keen a satisfaction does he discern and display the prosperous and practical man in Shakespeare—the qualities which made him a man of substance and a Conservative politician, as well as the qualities which made him a great dramatist and a great dreamer. No doubt Bagehot had a strong personal sympathy with the double life. Somersetshire probably never believed that the imaginative student, the omnivorous reader, could prosper as a banker and a

[1] See vol. i., p. 173.

man of business, and it was a satisfaction to him to show that he understood the world far better than the world had ever understood him. Again, how delicate is his delineation of Hartley Coleridge; how firm and clear his study of "Sir Robert Peel";[1] and how graphically he paints the literary pageant of Gibbon's tame but splendid genius! Certainly the literary taste of England never made a greater blunder than when it passed by this remarkable volume of essays with comparatively little notice.

In 1858, Bagehot married the eldest daughter of the Right Honourable James Wilson, who died two years later in India, whither he had gone as the financial member of the Indian Council, to reduce to some extent the financial anarchy which then prevailed there. This marriage gave Bagehot nineteen years of undisturbed happiness, and certainly led to the production of his most popular and original, if not in every respect his most brilliant books. It connected him with the higher world of politics, without which he would hardly have studied and written as he did on the English Constitution; and by making him the Editor of the *Economist*, it compelled him to give his whole mind as much to the theoretic side of commerce and finance, as his own duties had already compelled him to give it to the practical side. But when I speak of his marriage as the last impulse which determined his chief work in life, I do not forget that he had long been prepared both for political and for financial speculation by his early education. His father, a man of firm and deliberate political convictions, had taken a very keen

[1] See *Biographical Studies*.

interest in the agitation for the great Reform Bill of 1832, and had materially helped to return a Liberal member for his county after it passed. Probably no one in all England knew the political history of the country since the peace more accurately than he. Bagehot often said that when he wanted any detail concerning the English political history of the last half-century, he had only to ask his father, to obtain it. His uncle, Mr. Vincent Stuckey, too, was a man of the world, and his house in Langport was a focus of many interests during Bagehot's boyhood. Mr. Stuckey had begun life at the Treasury, and was at one time private secretary to Mr. Huskisson ; and when he gave up that career to take a leading share in the Somersetshire Bank, he kept up for a long time his house in London, and his relations with political society there. He was fond of his nephew, as was Bagehot of him ; and there was always a large field of interests, and often there were men of eminence, to be found in his house. Thus, Bagehot had been early prepared for the wider field of political and financial thought, to which he gave up so much of his time after his marriage.

I need not say nearly as much on this later aspect of Bagehot's life as I have done on its early and more purely literary aspects, because his services in this direction are already well appreciated by the public. But this I should like to point out, that he could never have written as he did on the English Constitution, without having acutely studied living statesmen and their ways of acting on each other ; that his book was essentially the book of a most realistic, because a most vividly imaginative, observer of the actual world of

politics—the book of a man who was not blinded by habit and use to the enormous difficulties in the way of "government by public meeting," and to the secret of the various means by which in practice those difficulties had been attenuated or surmounted. It is the book of a meditative man who had mused much on the strange workings of human instincts, no less than of a quick observer who had seen much of external life. Had he not studied the men before he studied the institutions, had he not concerned himself with individual statesmen before he turned his attention to the mechanism of our Parliamentary system, he could never have written his book on the English Constitution.

I think the same may be said of his book on Physics and Politics, a book in which I find new force and depth every time I take it up afresh. It is true that Bagehot had a keen sympathy with natural science, that he devoured all Mr. Darwin's and Mr. Wallace's books, and many of a much more technical kind, as, for example, Professor Huxley's on the Principles of Physiology, and grasped the leading ideas contained in them with a firmness and precision that left nothing to be desired. But after all, *Physics and Politics* could never have been written without that sort of living insight into man which was the life of all his earlier essays. The notion that a "cake of custom," of rigid, inviolable law, was the first requisite for a strong human society, and that the very cause which was thus essential for the *first* step of progress—the step towards unity—was the great danger of the second step—the step out of uniformity—and was the secret of all arrested and petrified civilisations, like the Chinese, is an idea which

first germinated in Bagehot's mind at the time he was writing his cynical letters from Paris about stupidity being the first requisite of a political people; though I admit, of course, that it could not have borne the fruit it did, without Mr. Darwin's conception of a natural selection through conflict, to help it on. Such passages as the following could evidently never have been written by a mere student of Darwinian literature, nor without the trained imagination exhibited in Bagehot's literary essays:—

"No one will ever comprehend the arrested civilisations unless he sees the strict dilemma of early society. Either men had no law at all and lived in confused tribes, hardly hanging together, or they had to obtain a fixed law by processes of incredible difficulty. Those who surmounted that difficulty soon destroyed all those that lay in their way who did not. And then they themselves were caught in their own yoke. The customary discipline which could only be imposed on any early men by terrible sanctions, continued with those sanctions, and killed out of the whole society the propensities to variation which are the principle of progress. Experience shows how incredibly difficult it is to get men really to encourage the principle of originality;" [1]

and, as Bagehot held, for a very good reason, namely, that without a long accumulated and inherited tendency to discourage originality, society would never have gained the cohesion requisite for effective common action against its external foes. No one, I think, who had not studied as Bagehot had in actual life, first, the vast and unreasoning Conservatism of politically strong societies, like that of rural England, and next, the perilous mobility and impressibility of politically weak societies, like that of Paris, would ever have seen as he

[1] *Physics and Politics*, p. 57.

did the close connection of these ideas with Mr. Darwin's principle of natural selection by conflict. And here I may mention, by way of illustrating this point, that Bagehot delighted in observing and expounding the bovine slowness of rural England in acquiring a new idea. Somersetshire, he used to boast, would not subscribe £1000 "to be represented by an archangel"; and in one letter which I received from him during the Crimean War, he narrated with great gusto an instance of the tenacity with which a Somersetshire rustic stuck to his own notion of what was involved in conquering an enemy. "The Somersetshire view," he wrote, "of the chance of bringing the war to a successful conclusion is as follows:—*Countryman:* 'How old, zir, be the Zar?' —*Myself:* 'About sixty-three'.—*Countryman:* 'Well, now, I can't think however they be to take he. They do tell I that Rooshia is a very big place, and if he doo goo right into the middle of 'n, you could not take he, not nohow.' I talked till the train came (it was at a station), and endeavoured to show how the war might be finished without capturing the Czar, but I fear without effect. At last he said, 'Well, zir, I hope, *as you do say, zir,* we shall take he,' as I got into the carriage." It is clear that the humorous delight which Bagehot took in this tenacity and density of rural conceptions, was partly the cause of the attention which he paid to the subject. No doubt there was in him a vein of purely instinctive sympathy with this density, for intellectually he could not even have understood it. Writing on the intolerable and fatiguing cleverness of French journals, he describes in one of his Paris letters the true enjoyment he felt in reading a thoroughly

stupid article in the *Herald* (a Tory paper now no more), and I believe he was quite sincere. It was, I imagine, a real pleasure to him to be able to preach, in his last general work, that "a cake of custom," just sufficiently stiff to make innovation of any kind very difficult, but not quite stiff enough to make it impossible, is the true condition of durable progress.

The coolness of his judgment, and his power of seeing both sides of a question, undoubtedly gave Bagehot's political opinions considerable weight with both parties, and I am quite aware that a great majority of the ablest political thinkers of the time would disagree with me when I say, that personally I do not rate Bagehot's sagacity as a practical politician nearly so highly as I rate his wise analysis of the growth and *rationale* of political institutions. Everything he wrote on the politics of the day was instructive, but, to my mind at least, seldom decisive, and, as I thought, often not true. He did not feel, and avowed that he did not feel, much sympathy with the masses, and he attached far too much relative importance to the refinement of the governing classes. That, no doubt, is most desirable, if you can combine it with a genuine consideration for the interests of "the toiling millions of men sunk in labour and pain". But experience, I think, sufficiently shows that they are often, perhaps even generally, incompatible; and that democratic governments of very low tone may consult more adequately the leading interests of the "dim common populations" than aristocratic governments of very high calibre. Bagehot hardly admitted this, and always seemed to me to think far more of the intellectual and moral tone of governments, than

he did of the intellectual and moral interests of the people governed.

Again, those who felt most profoundly Bagehot's influence as a political thinker, would probably agree with me that it was his leading idea in politics to discourage anything like too much action of any kind, legislative or administrative, and most of all anything like an ambitious colonial or foreign policy. This was not owing to any *doctrinaire* adhesion to the principle of *laissez-faire*. He supported, hesitatingly no doubt, but in the end decidedly, the Irish Land Bill, and never belonged to that straitest sect of the Economists who decry, as contrary to the laws of economy, and little short of a crime, the intervention of Government in matters which the conflict of individual self-interests might possibly be trusted to determine. It was from a very different point of view that he was so anxious to deprecate ambitious policies, and curb the practical energies of the most energetic of peoples. Next to Clough, I think that Sir George Cornewall Lewis had the most powerful influence over him in relation to political principles. There has been no statesman in our time whom he liked so much or regretted so deeply; and he followed him most of all in deprecating the greater part of what is called political *energy*. Bagehot held with Sir George Lewis that men in modern days do a great deal too much; that half the public actions, and a great many of the private actions of men, had better never have been done; that modern statesmen and modern peoples are far too willing to burden themselves with responsibilities. He held, too, that men have not yet sufficiently verified the principles on which

action ought to proceed, and that till they have done so, it would be better far to act less. Lord Melbourne's habitual query, "Can't you let it alone?" seemed to him, as regarded all new responsibilities, the wisest of hints for our time. He would have been glad to find a fair excuse for giving up India, for throwing the Colonies on their own resources, and for persuading the English people to accept deliberately the place of a fourth or fifth-rate European power—which was not, in his estimation, a cynical or unpatriotic wish, but quite the reverse, for he thought that such a course would result in generally raising the calibre of the national mind, conscience, and taste. In his *Physics and Politics* he urges generally, as I have before pointed out, that the practical energy of existing peoples in the West, is far in advance of the knowledge that would alone enable them to turn that energy to good account. He wanted to see the English a more leisurely race, taking more time to consider all their actions, and suspending their decisions on all great policies and enterprises till either these were well matured, or, as he expected it to be in the great majority of cases, the opportunity for sensational action was gone by. He quotes from Clough what really might have been taken as the motto of his own political creed:—

> "Old things need not be therefore true,
> O brother men, nor yet the new;
> Ah, still awhile, th' old thought retain,
> And yet consider it again".

And in all this, if it were advanced rather as a principle of education than as a principle of political practice, there would be great force. But when he

applied this teaching, not to the individual but to the State, not to encourage the gradual formation of a new type of character, but to warn the nation back from a multitude of practical duties of a simple though arduous kind, such as those, for example, which we have undertaken in India—duties, the value of which, performed even as they are, could hardly be overrated, if only because they involve so few debatable and doubtful assumptions, and are only the elementary tasks of the hewers of wood and drawers of water for the civilisation of the future—I think Bagehot made the mistake of attaching far too little value to the moral instincts of a sagacious people, and too much to the refined deductions of a singularly subtle intellect. I suspect that the real effect of suddenly stopping the various safety-valves, by which the spare energy of our nation is diverted to the useful work of roughly civilising other lands, would be, not to stimulate the deliberative understanding of the English people, but to stunt its thinking as well as its acting powers, and render it more frivolous and more vacant-minded than it is.

In the field of economy there are so many thinkers who are far better judges of Bagehot's invaluable work than myself, that I will say a very few words indeed upon it. It is curious, but I believe it to be almost universally true, that what may be called the primitive impulse of all economic *action*, is generally also strong in great economic *thinkers* and financiers—I mean the saving, or at least the anti-spending, instinct. It is very difficult to see why it should be so, but I think it *is* so. No one was more large-minded in his view of finance than Bagehot. He preached that, in the case of a rich

country like England, efficiency was vastly more important than the mere reduction of expenditure, and held that Mr. Gladstone and other great Chancellors of the Exchequer made a great deal too much of saving for saving's sake. None the less he himself had the anti-spending instinct in some strength, and he was evidently pleased to note its existence in his favourite economic thinker, Ricardo. Generous as Bagehot was—and no one ever hesitated less about giving largely for an adequate end—he always told me, even in boyhood, that spending was disagreeable to him, and that it took something of an effort to pay away money. In a letter before me, he tells his correspondent of the marriage of an acquaintance, and adds that the lady is a Dissenter, "and therefore probably rich. Dissenters don't spend, *and quite right too.*" I suppose it takes some feeling of this kind to give the intellect of a man of high capacity that impulse towards the study of the laws of the increase of wealth, without which men of any imagination would be more likely to turn in other directions. Nevertheless, even as an economist, Bagehot's most original writing was due less to his deductions from the fundamental axioms of the modern science, than to that deep insight into men which he had gained in many different fields. The essays, published in the *Fortnightly Review* for February and May, 1876[1]—in which he showed so powerfully how few of the conditions of the science known to us as "political economy" have ever been really applicable to any large portion of the globe during the longest periods of human history—

[1] "The Postulates of Political Economy," etc., published in his *Economic Studies* after his death.

furnish quite an original study in social history and in human nature. His striking book, *Lombard Street*, is quite as much a study of bankers and bill-brokers as of the principles of banking. Take again, Bagehot's view of the intellectual position and value of the capitalist classes. Every one who knows his writings in the *Economist*, knows how he ridiculed the common impression that the chief service of the capitalist class—that by which they *earn* their profits—is merely what the late Mr. Senior used to call "abstinence," that is, the practice of deferring their enjoyment of their savings in order that those savings may multiply themselves; and knows too how inadequate he thought it, merely to add that when capitalists are themselves managers, they discharge the task of "superintending labour" as well. Bagehot held that the capitalists of a commercial country do—not merely the saving, and the work of foremen in superintending labour, but all the difficult intellectual work of commerce besides, and are so little appreciated as they are, chiefly because they are a dumb class who are seldom equal to explaining to others the complex processes by which they estimate the wants of the community, and conceive how best to supply them. He maintained that capitalists are the great generals of commerce, that they plan its whole strategy, determine its tactics, direct its commissariat, and incur the danger of great defeats, as well as earn, if they do not always gain, the credit of great victories.

Here again is a new illustration of the light which Bagehot's keen insight into men, taken in connection with his own intimate understanding of the commercial field, brought into his economic studies. He brought

life into these dry subjects from almost every side; for instance, in writing to the *Spectator*, many years ago, about the cliff scenery of Cornwall and especially about the pretty harbour of Boscastle, with its fierce sea and its two breakwaters—which leave a mere "Temple Bar" for the ships to get in at—a harbour of which he says that "the principal harbour of Liliput probably had just this look,"—he goes back in imagination at once to the condition of the country at the time when a great number of such petty harbours as these were essential to such trade as there was, and shows that at that time the Liverpool and London docks not only could not have been built for want of money, but would have been of no use if they had been built, since the auxiliary facilities which alone made such emporia useful did not exist. "Our old gentry built on their own estates as they could, and if their estates were near some wretched little haven, they were much pleased. The sea was the railway of those days. It brought, as it did to Ellangowan, in Dirk Hatteraick's time, brandy for the men and pinners for the women, to the loneliest of coast castles." It was by such vivid illustrations as this of the conditions of a very different commercial life from our own, that Bagehot lit up the "dismal science," till in his hands it became both picturesque and amusing.

Bagehot made two or three efforts to get into Parliament, but after an illness which he had in 1868 he deliberately abandoned the attempt, and held, I believe rightly, that his political judgment was all the sounder, as well as his health the better, for a quieter life. Indeed, he used to say of himself that it would be very

difficult for him to find a borough which would be willing to elect him its representative, because he was "between sizes in politics". Nevertheless in 1866 he was very nearly elected for Bridgewater, but was by no means pleased that he was so near success, for he stood to lose, not to win, in the hope that if he and his party were really quite pure, he might gain the seat on petition. He did his very best, indeed, to secure purity, though he failed. As a speaker, he did not often succeed. His voice had no great compass, and his manner was somewhat odd to ordinary hearers; but at Bridgewater he was completely at his ease, and his canvass and public speeches were decided successes. His examination, too, before the Commissioners sent down a year or two later to inquire into the corruption of Bridgewater was itself a great success. He not only entirely defeated the somewhat eagerly pressed efforts of one of the Commissioners, Mr. Anstey, to connect him with the bribery, but he drew a most amusing picture of the bribable electors whom he had seen only to shun. I will quote a little bit from the evidence he gave in reply to what Mr. Anstey probably regarded as home-thrusts:—

"42,018. (*Mr. Anstey*) Speaking from your experience of those streets, when you went down them canvassing, did any of the people say anything to you, or in your hearing, about money?—Yes, one, I recollect, standing at the door, who said, 'I won't vote for gentlefolks unless they do something for I. Gentlefolks do not come to I unless they want something of I, and I won't do nothing for gentlefolks, unless they do something for me.' Of course, I immediately retired out of that house.

"42,019. That man did not give you his promise?—I retired immediately; he stood in the doorway sideways, as these rustics do.

"42,020. Were there many such instances?—One or two, I remember. One suggested that I might have a place. I immediately retired from him.

"42,021. Did anybody of a better class than those voters, privately, of course, expostulate with you against your resolution to be pure?—No, nobody ever came to me at all.

"42,022. But those about you, did any of them say anything of this kind: 'Mr. Bagehot, you are quite wrong in putting purity of principles forward. It will not do if the other side bribes'?—I might have been told that I should be unsuccessful in the stream of conversation; many people may have told me that; that is how I gathered that if the other side was impure and we were pure, I should be beaten.

"42,023. Can you remember the names of any who told you that?—No, I cannot, but I daresay I was told by as many as twenty people, and we went upon that entire consideration."

To leave my subject without giving some idea of Bagehot's racy conversation would be a sin. He inherited this gift, I believe, in great measure from his mother, to whose stimulating teaching in early life he probably owed also a great deal of his rapidity of thought. A lady who knew him well, says that one seldom asked him a question without his answer making you either think or laugh, or both think and laugh together. And this is the exact truth. His habitual phraseology was always vivid. He used to speak, for instance, of the minor people, the youths or admirers who collect around a considerable man, as his "fringe". It was he who invented the phrase "padding," to denote the secondary kind of article, not quite of the first merit, but with interest and value of its own, with which a judicious editor will fill up, perhaps, three-quarters of his review. If you asked him what he thought on a subject on which he did not happen to have read or thought at all, he would open his large eyes and say, "My mind is 'to let' on that subject, pray tell me what to think"; though you soon found that this might be easier attempted than done. He

used to say banteringly to his mother, by way of putting her off at a time when she was anxious for him to marry: "A man's mother is his misfortune, but his wife is his fault". He told me once, at a time when the *Spectator* had perhaps been somewhat more eager or sanguine on political matters than he approved, that he always got his wife to "break" it to him on the Saturday morning, as he found it too much for his nerves to encounter its views without preparation. Then his familiar antitheses not unfrequently reminded me of Dickens's best touches in that line. He writes to a friend, "Tell —— that his policies went down in the *Colombo*, but were fished up again. *They are dirty, but valid.*" I remember asking him if he had enjoyed a particular dinner which he had rather expected to enjoy, but he replied, "No, the sherry was bad; tasted as if L—— had dropped his h's into it". His practical illustrations, too, were full of wit. In his address to the Bridgewater constituency, on the occasion when he was defeated by eight votes, he criticised most happily the sort of bribery which ultimately resulted in the disfranchisement of the place.

"I can make allowance," he said, "for the poor voter; he is most likely ill-educated, certainly ill-off, and a little money is a nice treat to him. What he does is wrong, but it is intelligible. What I do not understand is the position of the rich, respectable, virtuous members of a party which countenances these things. They are like the man who stole stinking fish; they commit a crime, and they get no benefit."

But perhaps the best illustration I can give of his more sardonic humour was his remark to a friend who had a church in the grounds near his house:—"Ah, you've got the church in the grounds! I like that

It's well the tenants shouldn't be *quite* sure that the landlord's power stops with this world." And his more humorous exaggerations were very happy. I remember his saying of a man who was excessively fastidious in rejecting under-done meat, that he once sent away a cinder "because it was red"; and he confided gravely to an early friend that when he was in low spirits, it cheered him to go down to the bank, and dabble his hand in a heap of sovereigns.[1] But his talk had finer qualities than any of these. One of his most intimate friends—both in early life, and later in Lincoln's Inn—Mr. T. Smith Osler, writes to me of it thus :—

"As an instrument for arriving at truth, I never knew anything like a talk with Bagehot. It had just the quality which the farmers desiderated in the claret, of which they complained that though it was very nice, it brought them 'no forrader'; for Bagehot's conversation did get you forward, and at a most amazing pace. Several ingredients went to this; the foremost was his power of getting to the heart of the subject, taking you miles beyond your starting point in a sentence, generally by dint of sinking to a deeper stratum. The next was his instantaneous appreciation of the bearing of everything you yourself said, making talk with him, as Roscoe once remarked, 'like riding a horse with a perfect mouth'. But most unique of all was his power of keeping up animation without combat. I never knew a power of discussion, of co-operative investigation of truth, to approach to it. It was all stimulus, and yet no contest."

[1] Since the last edition of this work was published I have been reminded of more good sayings of my husband's. After a little accident, when his head was caught between a cart and a lamp-post in the city, he said: "Now I know what a nut feels like when it is going to be cracked". He used to say that "children's holidays are parents' schooltime," and "business is more amusing than pleasure".—E. Bagehot.

But I must have done; and, indeed, it is next to impossible to convey, even faintly, the impression of Bagehot's vivid and pungent conversation to any one who did not know him. It was full of youth, and yet had all the wisdom of a mature judgment in it. The last time we met, only five days before his death, I remarked on the vigour and youthfulness of his look, and told him he looked less like a contemporary of my own than one of a younger generation. In a pencil-note, the last I received from him, written from bed on the next day but one, he said: "I think you must have had the evil eye when you complimented me on my appearance. Ever since, I have been sickening, and am now in bed with a severe attack on the lungs." Indeed, well as he appeared to me, he had long had delicate health, and heart disease was the immediate cause of death. In spite of a heavy cold on his chest, he went down to his father's for his Easter visit the day after I last saw him, and he passed away painlessly in sleep on the 24th March, 1877, aged fifty-one. It was at Herds Hill, the pretty place west of the river Parret, that flows past Langport, which his grandfather had made some fifty years before, that he breathed his last. He had been carried thither as an infant to be present when the foundation stone was laid of the home which he was never to inherit; and now very few of his name survive. Bagehot's family is believed to be the only one remaining that has retained the old spelling of the name, as it appears in Doomsday Book, the modern form being Bagot. The Gloucestershire family of the same name, from whose stock they are supposed to have sprung, died out in the beginning of this century.

Not very many perhaps, outside Bagehot's own inner circle, will carry about with them that hidden pain, that burden of emptiness, inseparable from an image which has hitherto been one full of the suggestions of life and power, when that life and power are no longer to be found; for he was intimately known only to the few. But those who do will hardly find again in this world a store of intellectual sympathy of so high a stamp, so wide in its range and so full of original and fresh suggestion, a judgment to lean on so real and so sincere, or a friend so frank and constant, with so vivid and tenacious a memory for the happy associations of a common past, and so generous in recognising the independent value of divergent convictions in the less pliant present.

R. H. H.

1st November, 1878.

LITERARY STUDIES.

HARTLEY COLERIDGE.[1]

(1852.)

HARTLEY COLERIDGE was not like the Duke of Wellington.[2] Children are urged by the example of the great statesman and warrior just departed—not indeed to neglect "their book" as he did—but to be industrious and thrifty; to "always perform business," to "beware of procrastination," to "NEVER fail to do their best": good ideas, as may be ascertained by referring to the masterly despatches on the Mahratta transactions—"great events," as the preacher continues, "which exemplify the efficacy of diligence even in regions where the very advent of our religion is as yet but partially made known". But

> "What a wilderness were this sad world,
> If man were always man and never child!"[3]

And it were almost a worse wilderness if there were not some, to relieve the dull monotony of activity, who are children through life; who act on wayward impulse, and whose will has never come; who toil not and who spin not; who always have "fair Eden's simpleness": and of such was Hartley Coleridge. "Don't you remember," writes

[1] Hartley Coleridge's *Lives of the Northern Worthies*. A new edition. 3 vols. Moxon.

[2] This essay was published immediately after the death of the Duke of Wellington.

[3] Hartley Coleridge: "Sonnet to Childhood".

Gray to Horace Walpole, when Lord B. and Sir H. C. and Viscount D., who are now great statesmen, were little dirty boys playing at cricket? For my part I do not feel one bit older or wiser now than I did then." For as some apply their minds to what is next them, and labour ever, and attain to governing the Tower, and entering the Trinity House,—to commanding armies, and applauding pilots,—so there are also some who are ever anxious to-day about what ought only to be considered to-morrow; who never get on; whom the earth neglects, and whom tradesmen little esteem; who are where they were; who cause grief, and are loved; that are at once a by-word and a blessing; who do not live in life, and it seems will not die in death: and of such was Hartley Coleridge.

A curious instance of poetic anticipation was in this instance vouchsafed to Wordsworth. When Hartley was six years old, he addressed to him these verses, perhaps the best ever written on a real and visible child:—

"O thou, whose fancies from afar are brought,
Who of thy words dost make a mock apparel
And fittest to unutterable thought
The breeze-like motion and the self-born carol;
Thou fairy voyager, that dost float
In such clear water that thy boat
May rather seem
To brood on air than on an earthly stream;
O blessed vision, happy child,
Thou art so exquisitely wild,
I think of thee with many fears
For what may be thy lot in future years.

. . . . .

"O too industrious folly!
O vain and causeless melancholy!
Nature will either end thee quite,
Or, lengthening out thy season of delight,
Preserve for thee by individual right
A young lamb's heart among the full-grown flocks."

And so it was. As often happens, being very little of a boy in actual childhood, Hartley preserved into manhood and age all of boyhood which he had ever possessed—its beaming imagination and its wayward will. He had none of the natural roughness of that age. He never played—partly from weakness, for he was very small, but more from awkwardness. His uncle Southey used to say he had two left hands, and might have added that they were both useless. He could no more have achieved football, or mastered cricket, or kept in with the hounds, than he could have followed Charles's Wain or played pitch and toss with Jupiter's satellites. Nor was he very excellent at school-work. He showed, indeed, no deficiency. The Coleridge family have inherited from the old scholar of Ottery St. Mary a certain classical facility which could not desert the son of Samuel Taylor. But his real strength was in his own mind. All children have a world of their own, as distinct from that of the grown people who gravitate around them as the dreams of girlhood from our prosaic life; as the ideas of the kitten that plays with the falling leaves, from those of her carnivorous mother that catches mice and is sedulous in her domestic duties. But generally about this interior existence children are dumb. You have warlike ideas, but you cannot say to a sinewy relative, "My dear aunt, I wonder when the big bush in the garden will begin to walk about; I'm sure it's a crusader, and I was cutting it all the day with my steel sword. But what do you think, aunt, for I'm puzzled about its legs, because you see, aunt, it has only *one* stalk; and besides, aunt, the leaves." You cannot remark this in secular life; but you hack at the infelicitous bush till you do not altogether reject the idea that your small garden is Palestine, and yourself the most adventurous of knights. Hartley had this, of course, like any other dreamy child, but in his case it was accompanied with the faculty of speech,

and an extraordinary facility in continuous story-telling. In the very earliest childhood he had conceived a complete outline of a country like England, whereof he was king himself, and in which there were many wars, and rumours of wars, and foreign relations and statesmen, and rebels and soldiers. "My people, Derwent," he used to begin, "are giving me much pain; they want to go to war." This faculty, as was natural, showed itself before he went to school, but he carried on the habit of fanciful narration even into that bleak and ungenial region. "It was not," says his brother, "by a series of tales, but by one continuous tale, regularly evolved, and possessing a real unity, that he enchained the attention of his auditors, night after night, as we lay in bed, for a space of years, and not unfrequently for hours together." . . . "There was certainly," he adds, "a great variety of persons sharply characterised, who appeared on the stage in combination and not in succession." Connected, in Hartley, with this premature development of the imagination, there was a singular deficiency in what may be called the *sense* of reality. It is alleged that he hardly knew that Ejuxrea, which is the name of his kingdom, was not as solid a *terra firma* as Keswick or Ambleside. The deficiency showed itself on other topics. His father used to tell a story of his metaphysical questioning. When he was about five years old, he was asked, doubtless by the paternal metaphysician, some question as to why he was called Hartley. "Which Hartley?" replied the boy. "Why, is there more than one Hartley?" "Yes, there is a deal of Hartleys; there is Picture Hartley (Hazlitt had painted a picture of him), and Shadow Hartley, and there's Echo Hartley, and there's Catchmefast Hartley," seizing his own arm very eagerly, and as if reflecting on the "summject and ommject," which is to say, being in hopeless confusion. We do not hear whether he was puzzled and perplexed by such diffi-

culties in later life ; and the essays which we are reviewing, though they contain much keen remark on the detail of human character, are destitute of the Germanic profundities ; they do not discuss how existence is possible, nor enumerate the pure particulars of the soul itself. But considering the idle dreaminess of his youth and manhood, we doubt if Hartley ever got over his preliminary doubts—ever properly grasped the idea of fact and reality. This is not nonsense. If you attend acutely, you may observe that in few things do people differ more than in their perfect and imperfect realisation of this earth. To the Duke of Wellington a coat was a coat ; "there was no mistake" ; no reason to disbelieve it ; and he carried to his grave a perfect and indubitable persuasion that he really did (what was his best exploit), without fluctuation, *shave* on the morning of the battle of Waterloo. You could not have made him doubt it. But to many people who will never be Field-Marshals, there is on such points, not rational doubt, but instinctive questioning. "Who the devil," said Lord Byron, "could *make* such a world ? No one, I believe." "Cast your thoughts," says a very different writer,[1] "back on the time when our ancient buildings were first reared. Consider the churches all around us ; how many generations have passed since stone was put upon stone, till the whole edifice was finished ! The first movers and instruments of its erection, the minds that planned it, and the limbs that wrought at it, the pious hands that contributed to it, and the holy lips that consecrated it, have long, long ago been taken away, yet we benefit by their good deed. Does it not seem strange that men should be able, not merely by acting on others, not by a continued influence carried on through many minds in succession, but by a single direct act, to come into contact with us, and, as if with their own hand, to benefit us who live centuries later ? " Or again, speaking

[1] John Henry Newman.

of the lower animals: "Can anything be more marvellous or startling, than that we should have a race of beings about us, whom we do but see, and as little know their state, or can describe their interests or their destiny, as we can tell of the inhabitants of the sun and moon? It is indeed a very overpowering thought, that we hold intercourse with creatures who are as much strangers to us, as mysterious as if they were the fabulous, unearthly beings, more powerful than man, and yet his slaves, which Eastern superstitions have invented. . . . Cast your thoughts abroad on the whole number of them, large and small, in vast forests, or in the water, or in the air, and then say whether the presence of such countless multitudes, so various in their natures, so strange and wild in their shapes, is not" as incredible as anything can be. We go into a street, and see it thronged with men, and we say, Is it *true*, *are* there these men? We look on a creeping river, till we say, *Is* there this river? We enter the law courts: we watch the patient Chancellor: we hear the droning wigs:—surely this is not real,—this is a dream,—nobody would do *that*,—it is a delusion. We are really, as the sceptics insinuate, but "sensations and impressions," in groups or alone, that float up and down; or, as the poet teaches, phantoms and images, whose idle stir but mocks the calm reality of the "pictures on the wall". All this will be called dreamy; but it is exactly because it *is* dreamy that we notice it. Hartley Coleridge was a dreamer: he began with Ejuxrea, and throughout his years, he but slumbered and slept. Life was to him a floating haze, a disputable mirage: you must not treat him like a believer in stocks and stones—you might as well say he was a man of business.

Hartley's school education is not worth recounting; but beside and along with it there was another education, on every side of him, singularly calculated to bring out the

peculiar aptitudes of an imaginative mind, yet exactly, on that very account, very little likely to bring it down to fact and reality, to mix it with miry clay, or define its dreams by a daily reference to the common and necessary earth. He was bred up in the house of Mr. Southey, where, more than anywhere else in all England, it was held that literature and poetry are the aim and object of every true man, and that grocery and other affairs lie beneath at a wholly immeasurable distance, to be attended to by the inferior animals. In Hartley's case the seed fell on fitting soil. In youth, and even in childhood, he was a not unintelligent listener to the unspeakable talks of the Lake poets.

"It was so," writes his brother, "rather than by a regular course of study, that he was educated; by desultory reading, by the living voice of Coleridge, Southey, and Wordsworth, Lloyd, Wilson, and De Quincey; and again, by homely familiarity with townsfolk and countryfolk of every degree; lastly, by daily recurring hours of solitude—by lonely wanderings with the murmur of the Brathay in his ear."

Thus he lived till the time came that he should go to Oxford, and naturally enough, it seems, he went up with much hope and strong excitement; for, quiet and calm as seem those ancient dormitories, to him, as to many, the going among them seemed the first entrance into the real world—the end of torpidity—the beginning of life. He had often stood by the white Rydal Water, and thought it was coming, and now it was come in fact. At first his Oxford life was prosperous enough. An old gentleman,[1] who believes that he too was once an undergraduate, well remembers how Hartley's eloquence was admired at wine parties and breakfast parties. "Leaning his head on one shoulder, turning up his dark bright eyes, and swinging backwards and forwards

[1] Rev. Alexander Dyce.

in his chair, he would hold forth by the hour, for no one wished to interrupt him, on whatever subject might have been started—either of literature, politics, or religion—with an originality of thought, a force of illustration," which the narrator doubts "if any man then living, except his father, could have surpassed". The singular gift of continuous conversation—for singular it is, if in any degree agreeable—seems to have come to him by nature, and it was through life the one quality which he relied on for attraction in society. Its being agreeable is to be accounted for mainly by its singularity; if one knew any respectable number of declaimers—if any proportion of one's acquaintance should receive the gift of the English language, and "improve each shining hour" with liquid eloquence, how we should regret their present dumb and torpid condition! If we are to be dull—which our readers will admit to be an appointment of providence—surely we will be dull in silence. Do not sermons exist, and are they not a warning to mankind?

In fact, the habit of common and continuous speech is a symptom of mental deficiency. It proceeds from not knowing what is going on in other people's minds. S. T. Coleridge, it is well known, talked to everybody, and to everybody alike; like a Christian divine, he did not regard persons. "That is a fine opera, Mr. Coleridge," said a young lady, some fifty years back. "Yes, ma'am; and I remember Kant somewhere makes a very similar remark, for, as *we* know, the idea of philosophical infinity ——" Now, this sort of talk will answer with two sorts of people—with comfortable, stolid, solid people, who don't understand it at all—who don't feel that they ought to understand it—who feel that they ought not—that *they* are to sell treacle and appreciate figs—but that there *is* this transcendental superlunary sphere, which is known to others—which is now revealed in the spiritual speaker, the unmitigated oracle, the

evidently celestial sound. That the dreamy orator himself has no more notion what is passing in their minds than they have what is running through his, is of no consequence at all. If he did know it, he would be silent; he would be jarred to feel how utterly he was misunderstood; it would break the flow of his everlasting words. Much better that he should run on in a never-pausing stream, and that the wondering rustics should admire for ever. The basis of the entertainment is that neither should comprehend the other. —But in a degree yet higher is the society of an omniscient orator agreeable to a second sort of people,—generally young men, and particularly—as in Hartley's case—clever undergraduates. All young men like what is theatrical, and by a fine dispensation all clever young men like notions. They want to hear about opinions, to know about opinions. The ever-flowing rhetorician gratifies both propensions. He is a notional *spectacle*. Like the sophist of old, he *is* something and says something. The vagabond speculator in all ages will take hold on those who wish to reason, and want premises—who wish to argue, and want theses—who desire demonstrations, and have but presumptions. And so it was acceptable enough that Hartley should make the low tones of his musical voice glide sweetly and spontaneously through the cloisters of Merton, debating the old questions, the "fate, free-will, foreknowledge,"—the points that Ockham and Scotus propounded in these same enclosures—the common riddles, the everlasting enigmas of mankind. It attracts the scorn of middle-aged men (who depart πρὸς τὰ ἱερά, and fancy they are wise), but it is a pleasant thing, that impact of hot thought upon hot thought, of young thought upon young thought, of new thought upon new thought. It comes to the fortunate once, but to no one a second time thereafter for ever.

Nor was Hartley undistinguished in the regular studies

of the University. A regular, exact, accurate scholar he never was; but even in his early youth he perhaps knew much more and understood much more of ancient literature than seven score of schoolmasters and classmen. He had, probably, in his mind a picture of the ancient world, or of some of it, while the dry *literati* only know the combinations and permutations of the Greek alphabet. There is a pleasant picture of him at this epoch, recorded by an eye-witness. "My attention," he narrates, "was at first aroused by seeing from a window a figure flitting about amongst the trees and shrubs of the garden with quick and agitated motion. This was Hartley, who, in the ardour of preparing for his college examination, did not even take his meals with the family, but snatched a hasty morsel in his own apartment, and only sought the free air when the fading daylight prevented him from seeing his books. Having found who he was that so mysteriously flitted about the garden, I was determined to lose no time in making his acquaintance, and through the instrumentality of Mrs. Coleridge I paid Hartley a visit in what he called his den. This was a room afterwards converted by Mr. Southey"—as what chink was not?—"into a supplementary library, but then appropriated as a study to Hartley, and presenting a most picturesque and student-like disorder of scattered pamphlets and folios." This is not a picture of the business-like reading man—one wonders what fraction of his time he did read—but it was probably the happiest period of his life. There was no coarse prosaic action there. Much musing, little studying,—fair scholarship, an atmosphere of the classics, curious fancies, much perusing of pamphlets, light thoughts on heavy folios —these make the meditative poet, but not the technical and patient-headed scholar; yet, after all, he was happy, and obtained a second class.

A more suitable exercise, as it would have seemed at first

sight, was supplied by that curious portion of Oxford routine, the Annual Prize Poem. This, he himself tells us, was, in his academic years, the real and single object of his ambition. His reason is, for an autobiographical reason, decidedly simple. "A great poet," he says, "I should not have imagined myself, for I knew well enough that the verses were no great things." But he entertained at that period of life—he was twenty-one—a favourable opinion of young ladies; and he seems to have ascertained, possibly from actual trial, that verses were not in themselves a very emphatic attraction. Singular as it may sound, the ladies selected were not only insensible to what is, after all, a metaphysical line, the distinction between good poetry and bad, but were almost indifferent to poetry itself. Yet the experiment was not quite conclusive. Verses might fail in common life, and yet succeed in the Sheldonian theatre. It is plain that they would be *read out;* it occurred to him, as he naïvely relates, that if he should appear "as a prizeman," "as an intelligible reciter of poetry," he would be an object of "some curiosity to the fair promenaders in Christchurch Meadow"; that the young ladies "with whom he was on bowing and speaking terms might have felt a satisfaction in being known to know me, which they had never experienced before". "I should," he adds, "have deemed myself a prodigious lion, and it was a character I was weak enough to covet more than that of poet, scholar, or philosopher."

In fact, he did not get the prize. The worthy East Indian who imagined that, in leaving a bequest for a prize to poetry, he should be as sure of possessing poetry for his money as of eggs, if he had chosen eggs, or butter, if he had chosen butter, did not estimate rightly the nature of poetry, or the nature of the human mind. The mechanical parts of rhythm and metre are all that a writer can be certain of producing, or that a purchaser can be sure of obtaining;

and these an industrious person will find in any collection of the Newdegate poems, together with a fine assortment of similes and sentiments, respectively invented and enjoined by Shem and Japhet for and to the use of after generations. And there is a peculiar reason why a great poet (besides his being, as a man of genius, rather more likely than another, to find a difficulty in the preliminary technicalities of art) should not obtain an academical prize, to be given for excellent verses to people of about twenty-one. It is a bad season. "The imagination," said a great poet of the very age, "of a boy is healthy, and the mature imagination of a man is healthy, but there is a space of life between, in which the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted."[1] And particularly in a real poet, where the disturbing influences of passion and fancy are most likely to be in excess, will this unhealthy tinge be most likely to be excessive and conspicuous. Nothing in the style of "Endymion" would have a chance of a prize; there are no complete conceptions, no continuance of adequate words. What is worse, there are no defined thoughts, or aged illustrations. The characteristic of the whole is beauty and novelty, but it is beauty which is not formed, and novelty which is strange and wavering. Some of these defects are observable in the copy of verses on the "Horses of Lysippus," which Hartley Coleridge contributed to the list of unsuccessful attempts. It does not contain so much originality as we might have expected; on such a topic we anticipated more nonsense; a little, we are glad to say, there is, and also that there is an utter want of those even raps which are the music of prize poems,—which were the right rhythm for Pope's elaborate sense, but are quite unfit for dreamy classics or contemplative enthusiasm. If Hartley, like Pope, had been the son of a shopkeeper, he would

[1] Keats in the Preface to "Endymion".

not have received the paternal encouragement, but rather a reprimand,—"Boy, boy, these be bad rhymes"; and so, too, believed a grizzled and cold examiner.

A much worse failure was at hand. He had been elected to a Fellowship, in what was at that time the only open foundation in Oxford, Oriel College: an event which shows more exact scholarship in Hartley, or more toleration in the academical authorities for the grammatical delinquencies of a superior man, than we should have been inclined, *a priori*, to attribute to either of them. But it soon became clear that Hartley was not exactly suited to that place. Decorum is the essence, pomposity the advantage, of tutors. These Hartley had not. Beside the serious defects which we shall mention immediately, he was essentially an absent and musing, and therefore at times a highly indecorous man; and though not defective in certain kinds of vanity, there was no tinge in his manner of scholastic dignity. A schoolmaster should have an atmosphere of awe, and walk wonderingly, as if he was amazed at being himself. But an excessive sense of the ludicrous disabled Hartley altogether from the acquisition of this valuable habit; perhaps he never really attempted to obtain it. He accordingly never became popular as a tutor, nor was he ever described as "exercising an influence over young persons". Moreover, however excellently suited Hartley's eloquence might be to the society of undergraduates, it was out of place at the Fellows' table. This is said to be a dull place. The excitement of early thought has passed away; the excitements of active manhood are unknown. A certain torpidity seems natural there. We find too that, probably for something to say, he was in those years rather fond of exaggerated denunciation of the powers that be. This is not the habit most grateful to the heads of houses. "Sir," said a great authority, "do you deny that Lord Derby ought to be Prime Minister? you might as well

say, that I ought not to be Warden of So and So." These habits rendered poor Hartley no favourite with the leading people of his college, and no great prospective shrewdness was required to predict that he would fare but ill, if any sufficient occasion should be found for removing from the place, a person so excitable and so little likely to be of use in inculcating "safe" opinions among the surrounding youth.

Unhappily, the visible morals of Hartley offered an easy occasion. It is not quite easy to gather from the narrative of his brother the exact nature or full extent of his moral delinquencies; but enough is shown to warrant, according to the rules, the unfavourable judgment of the collegiate authorities. He describes, probably truly, the commencement of his errors—"I verily believe that I should have gone crazy, silly, mad with vanity, had I obtained the prize for my 'Horses of Lysippus'. It was the only occasion in my life wherein I was keenly disappointed, for it was the only one upon which I felt any confident hope. I had made myself very sure of it; and the intelligence that not I but Macdonald was the lucky man, absolutely stupefied me; yet I contrived for a time to lose all sense of my misfortunes in exultation for Burton's success. . . . I sang, I danced, I whistled, I ran from room to room, announcing the great tidings, and trying to persuade myself that I cared nothing at all for my own case. But it would not do. It was bare sands with me the next day. It was not the mere loss of the prize, but the feeling or phantasy of an adverse destiny. . . . I foresaw that all my aims and hopes would prove frustrate and abortive; and from that time I date my downward declension, my impotence of will, and my melancholy recklessness. It was the first time I sought relief in wine, which, as usual in such cases, produced not so much intoxication as downright madness." Cast in an uncongenial

society, requiring to live in an atmosphere of respect and affection—and surrounded by gravity and distrust—misconstrued and half tempted to maintain the misconstruction; with the waywardness of childhood without the innocency of its impulses; with the passions of manhood without the repressive vigour of a man's will,—he lived as a woman lives that is lost and forsaken, who sins ever and hates herself for sinning, but who sins, perhaps, more on that very account; because she requires some relief from the keenness of her own reproach; because, in her morbid fancy, the idea is ever before her; because her petty will is unable to cope with the daily craving and the horrid thought—that she may not lose her own identity—that she may not give in to the rigid, the distrustful, and the calm.

There is just this excuse for Hartley, whatever it may be worth, that the weakness was hereditary. We do not as yet know, it seems most likely that we shall never know, the precise character of his father. But with all the discrepancy concerning the details, enough for our purpose is certain of the outline. We know that he lived many and long years a prey to weaknesses and vice of this very description; and though it be false and mischievous to speak of hereditary vice, it is most true and wise to observe the mysterious fact of hereditary temptation. Doubtless it is strange that the nobler emotions and the inferior impulses, their peculiar direction or their proportionate strength, the power of a fixed idea—that the inner energy of the very will, which seems to issue from the inmost core of our complex nature, and to typify, if anything does, the pure essence of the immortal soul—that these and such as these should be transmitted by material descent, as though they were an accident of the body, the turn of an eye-brow or the feebleness of a joint,—if this were not obvious, it would be as amazing, perhaps more amazing, than any fact which we know; it looks not

only like predestinated, but even heritable election. But, explicable or inexplicable—to be wondered at or not wondered at—the fact is clear; tendencies and temptations are transmitted even to the fourth generation both for good and for evil, both in those who serve God and in those who serve Him not. Indeed, the weakness before us seems essentially connected—perhaps we may say on a final examination essentially identical—with the dreaminess of mind, the inapprehensiveness of reality which we remarked upon before. Wordsworth used to say, that "at a particular stage of his mental progress he used to be frequently so wrapt into an unreal transcendental world of ideas, that the external world seemed no longer to exist in relation to him, and he had to convince himself of its existence by *clasping a tree* or something that happened to be near him". But suppose a mind which did not feel acutely the sense of reality which others feel, in hard contact with the tangible universe; which was blind to the distinction between the palpable and the impalpable, or rather lived in the latter in preference to, and nearly to the exclusion of, the former. What is to fix such a mind, what is to strengthen it, to give it a fulcrum? To exert itself, the will, like the arm, requires to have an obvious and a definite resistance, to know where it is, why it is, whence it comes, and whither it goes. "We are such stuff as dreams are made of," says Prospero. So, too, the difficulty of Shakespeare's greatest dreamer, Hamlet, is that he cannot quite believe that his duty is to be done where it lies, and immediately. Partly from the natural effect of a vision of a spirit which is not, but more from native constitution and instinctive bent, he is for ever speculating on the reality of existence, the truth of the world. "How," discusses Kant, "is Nature in general possible?" and so asked Hamlet too. With this feeling on his mind, persuasion is useless and argument in vain. Examples gross as earth exhort him,

but they produce no effect; but he thinks and thinks the more.

> "Now whether it be
> Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
> Of thinking too precisely on the event,—
> A thought which quarter'd hath but one part wisdom
> And ever three parts coward,—I do not know
> Why yet I live to say, 'This thing's to do,'
> Sith I have cause and will and strength and means
> To do 't." [1]

Hartley himself well observes that on such a character the likelihood of action is inversely as the force of the motive and the time for deliberation. The stronger the reason, the more certain the scepticism. *Can* anything be so certain? Does not the excess of the evidence alleged make it clear that there is something behind, something on the other side? Search then diligently lest anything be overlooked. Reflection "puzzles the will," Necessity "benumbs like a torpedo": and so

> "The native hue of resolution
> Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
> And enterprises of great pith and moment
> With this regard, their currents turn awry,
> And lose the name of action". [2]

Why should we say any more? We do but "chant snatches of old tunes". But in estimating men like the Coleridges—the son even more than the father—we must take into account this peculiar difficulty—this dreamy unbelief—this daily scepticism—this haunting unreality—and imagine that some may not be quite responsible either for what they do, or for what they do not—because they are bewildered, and deluded, and perplexed, and want the faculty as much to comprehend their difficulty as to subdue it.

[1] Shakespeare: "Hamlet". [2] *Ibid.*

The Oxford life of Hartley is all his life. The failure of his prospects there, in his brother's words, "deprived him of the residue of his years". The biography afterwards goes to and fro—one attempt after another failing, some beginning in much hope, but even the sooner for that reason issuing in utter despair. His literary powers came early to full perfection. For some time after his expulsion from Oriel he was resident in London, and the poems written there are equal, perhaps are superior, to any which he afterwards produced. This sonnet may serve as a specimen:—

"In the great city we are met again
Where many souls there are, that breathe and die
Scarce knowing more of Nature's potency
Than what they learn from heat or cold or rain,
The sad vicissitude of weary pain:—
For busy man is lord of ear and eye,
And what hath Nature, but the vast, void sky,
And the throng'd river toiling to the main?
Oh! say not so, for she shall have her part
In every smile, in every tear that falls,
And she shall hide her in the secret heart
Where love persuades and sterner duty calls;
But worse it were than death or sorrow's smart,
To live without a friend within these walls."

He soon, however, went down to the lakes, and there, except during one or two short intervals, he lived and died. This exception was a residence at Leeds, during which he brought out, besides a volume containing his best poems, the book which stands at the head of our article—the *Lives of Northern Worthies*. We selected the book, we confess, with the view mainly of bringing a remarkable character before the notice of our readers—but in itself the work is an excellent one, and of a rare kind.

Books are for various purposes—tracts to teach, almanacs to sell, poetry to make pastry, but this is the rarest sort of

book, a book to *read*. As Dr. Johnson said, "Sir, a good book is one you can hold in your hand, and take to the fire". Now there are extremely few books which can, with any propriety, be so treated. When a great author, as Grote or Gibbon, has devoted a whole life of horrid industry to the composition of a large history, one feels one ought not to touch it with a mere hand—it is not respectful. The idea of slavery hovers over the *Decline and Fall*. Fancy a stiffly dressed gentleman, in a stiff chair, slowly writing that stiff compilation in a stiff hand: it is enough to stiffen you for life. Or is poetry readable? Of course it is rememberable; when you have it in the mind, it clings; if by heart, it haunts. Imagery comes from it; songs which lull the ear, heroines that waste the time. But this Biographia is actually read; a man is glad to take it up, and slow to lay it down; it is a book which is truly valuable, for it is truly pleasing; and which a man who has once had it in his library would miss from his shelves, not only in the common way, by a physical vacuum, but by a mental deprivation. This strange quality it owes to a peculiarity of style. Many people give many theories of literary composition, and Dr. Blair, whom we will read, is sometimes said to have exhausted the subject; but, unless he has proved the contrary, we believe that the knack in style is to write like a human being. Some think they must be wise, some elaborate, some concise; Tacitus wrote like a pair of stays; some startle as Thomas Carlyle, or a comet, inscribing with his tail. But legibility is given to those who neglect these notions, and are willing to be themselves, to write their own thoughts in their own words, in the simplest words, in the words wherein they were thought; and such, and so great, was in this book the magnanimity of Hartley.

As has been said, from his youth onwards, Hartley's outward life was a simple blank. Much writing, and much

musing, some intercourse with Wordsworth, some talking to undergraduate readers or Lake ladies, great loneliness, and much intercourse with the farmers of Cumberland—these pleasures, simple enough, most of them, were his life. The extreme pleasure of the peasantry in his conversation, is particularly remarked. "Aye, but Mr. Coleridge talks fine," observed one. "I would go through fire and water for Mr. C.," interjected another. His father, with real wisdom, had provided (in part, at least) for his necessary wants in the following manner:—

"This is a codicil to my last will and testament.

"S. T. COLERIDGE.

"Most desirous to secure, as far as in me lies, for my dear son Hartley, the tranquillity essential to any continued and successful exertion of his literary talents, and which, from the like characters of our minds in this respect, I know to be especially requisite for his happiness, and persuaded that he will recognise in this provision that anxious affection by which it is dictated, I affix this codicil to my last will and testament. . . . And I hereby request them (the said trustees) to hold the sum accruing to Hartley Coleridge from the equal division of my total bequest between him, his brother Derwent, and his sister Sara, after his mother's decease, to dispose of the interests or proceeds of the same portion to or for the use of my dear son Hartley Coleridge, at such time or times, in such manner, or under such conditions, as they, the trustees above named, know to be my wish, and shall deem conducive to the attainment of my object in adding the codicil, namely, the anxious wish to ensure for my son the continued means of a home, in which I comprise board, lodging, and raiment. Providing that nothing in this codicil shall be so interpreted as to interfere with my son H. C.'s freedom of choice respecting his place of residence, or with his power of disposing of his portion by will after his decease according as his own judgments and affections may decide."

An excellent provision, which would not, however, by the English law, have disabled the "said Hartley" from depriving himself of "the continued means of a home" by

alienating the principal of the bequest; since the jurisprudence of this country has no legal definition of "prodigality," and does not consider any person incompetent to manage his pecuniary affairs unless he be quite and certainly insane. Yet there undoubtedly are persons, and poor Hartley was one of them, who though in general perfectly sane, and even with superior powers of thought or fancy, are as completely unable as the most helpless lunatic to manage any pecuniary transactions, and to whom it would be a great gain to have perpetual guardians and compulsory trustees. But such people are rare, and few principles are so English as the maxim *de minimis non curat lex.*

He lived in this way for thirty years, or nearly so, but there is nothing to tell of all that time. He died 6th January, 1849, and was buried in Grasmere churchyard—the quietest place in England, "by the yews," as Arnold says, "that Wordsworth planted, the Rotha with its big silent pools passing by". It was a shining January day when Hartley was borne to the grave. "Keep the ground for us," said Mr. Wordsworth to the sexton; "we are old, and it cannot be long."

We have described Hartley's life at length for a peculiar reason. It is necessary to comprehend his character, to appreciate his works; and there is no way of delineating character but by a selection of characteristic sayings and actions. All poets, as is commonly observed, are delineated in their poems, but in very different modes. Each minute event in the melancholy life of Shelley is frequently alluded to in his writings. The tender and reverential character of Virgil is everywhere conspicuous in his pages. It is clear that Chaucer was shrewd. We seem to have talked with Shakespeare, though we have forgotten the facts of his life; but it is not by minute allusion, or a tacit influence, or a genial and delightful sympathy, that a writer like Hartley

Coleridge leaves the impress of himself, but in a more direct manner, which it will take a few words to describe.

Poetry begins in Impersonality. Homer is a voice—a fine voice, a fine eye, and a brain that drew with light; and this is all we know. The natural subjects of the first art are the scenes and events in which the first men naturally take an interest. They don't care—who does?—for a kind old man; but they want to hear of the exploits of their ancestors—of the heroes of their childhood—of them that their fathers saw—of the founders of their own land—of wars, and rumours of wars—of great victories boldly won—of heavy defeats firmly borne—of desperate disasters unsparingly retrieved. So in all countries—Siegfried, or Charlemagne, or Arthur—they are but attempts at an Achilles: the subject is the same—the κλέα ἀνδρῶν and the death that comes to all. But then the mist of battles passes away, and the sound of the daily conflict no longer hurtles in the air, and a generation arises skilled with the skill of peace, and refined with the refinement of civilisation, yet still remembering the old world, still appreciating the old life, still wondering at the old men, and ready to receive, at the hand of the poet, a new telling of the old tale—a new idealisation of the legendary tradition. This is the age of dramatic art, when men wonder at the big characters of old, as schoolboys at the words of Æschylus, and try to find in their own breasts the roots of those monstrous, but artistically developed impersonations. With civilisation too comes another change: men wish not only to tell what they have seen, but also to express what they are conscious of. Barbarians feel only hunger, and that is not lyrical; but as time runs on, arise gentler emotions and finer moods and more delicate desires which need expression, and require from the artist's fancy the lightest touches and the most soothing and insinuating words. Lyrical poetry, too, as we know, is of various kinds.

Some, as the war song, approach to the epic, depict events and stimulate to triumph; others are love songs to pour out wisdom, others sober to describe champagne; some passive and still, and expressive of the higher melancholy, as Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard". But with whatever differences of species and class, the essence of lyrical poetry remains in all identical; it is designed to express, and when successful does express, some one mood, some single sentiment, some isolated longing in human nature. It deals not with man as a whole, but with man piecemeal, with man in a scenic aspect, with man in a peculiar light. Hence lyrical poets must not be judged literally from their lyrics: they are discourses; they require to be reduced into the scale of ordinary life, to be stripped of the enraptured element, to be clogged with gravitating prose. Again, moreover, and in course of time, the advance of ages and the progress of civilisation appear to produce a new species of poetry which is distinct from the lyrical, though it grows out of it, and contrasted with the epic, though in a single respect it exactly resembles it. This kind may be called the *self-delineative*, for in it the poet deals not with a particular desire, sentiment, or inclination in his own mind, not with a special phase of his own character, not with his love of war, his love of ladies, his melancholy, but with his mind viewed as a whole, with the entire essence of his own character. The first requisite of this poetry is truth. It is, in Plato's phrase, the soul "itself by itself" aspiring to view and take account of the particular notes and marks that distinguish it from all other souls. The sense of reality is necessary to excellence; the poet being himself, speaks like one who has authority; he knows and must not deceive. This species of poetry, of course, adjoins on the lyrical, out of which it historically arises. Such a poem as the "Elegy" is, as it were, on the borders of the two; for while it expresses but a single emo-

tion, meditative, melancholy, you seem to feel that this sentiment is not only then and for a moment the uppermost, but (as with Gray it was) the habitual mood, the pervading emotion of his whole life. Moreover, in one especial peculiarity, this sort of poetry is analogous to the narrative or epic. No two things certainly can, in a general aspect, be more distantly removed one from another, the one dealing in external objects and stirring events, the other with the stillness and repose of the poet's mind; but still in a single characteristic the two coincide. They describe character, as the painters say, *in mass*. The defect of the drama is, that it can delineate only motion. If a thoughtful person will compare the character of Achilles, as we find it in Homer, with the more surpassing creations of dramatic invention, say with Lear or Othello, he will perhaps feel that character in repose, character on the lonely beach, character in marble, character in itself, is more clearly and perfectly seen in the epic narrative, than in the conversational drama. It of course requires immense skill to make mere talk exhibit a man as he is ἑτάρων ἄφαρ. Now this quality of epic poetry the self-delineative precisely shares with it. It describes a character—the poet's—alone by itself. And therefore, when the great master in both kinds did not hesitate to turn aside from his "high argument" to say—

> "More safe I sing with mortal voice unchanged
> To hoarse or mute, though fallen on evil days,"[1]

pedants may prose as they please about the "impropriety" of "interspersing" species of composition which are by nature remote; but Milton felt more profoundly that in its treatment of character the egotistical poetry is allied to the epic; that he was putting together elements which would

[1] *Paradise Lost.*

harmoniously combine; that he was but exerting the same faculties in either case—being guided thereto by a sure instinct, the desire of genius to handle and combine every one of the subjects on which it is genius.

Now it is in this self-delineative species of poetry that, in our judgment, Hartley Coleridge has attained to nearly, if not quite, the highest excellence; it pervades his writings everywhere. But a few sonnets may be quoted to exemplify it:—

"We parted on the mountains, as two streams
From one clear spring pursue their several ways;
And thy fleet course has been through many a maze
In foreign lands, where silvery Padus gleams
To that delicious sky, whose glowing beams
Brightened the tresses that old poets praise,
Where Petrarch's patient love and artful lays,
And Ariosto's song of many themes,
Moved the soft air.—But I, a lazy brook,
As close pent up within my native dell,
Have crept along from nook to shady nook,
Where flow'rets blow and whispering Naiads dwell.
Yet now we meet that parted were so wide,
For rough and smooth to travel side by side.

"Once I was young, and fancy was my all,
My love, my joy, my grief, my hope, my fear,
And ever ready as an infant's tear,
Whate'er in Fancy's kingdom might befall,
Some quaint device had Fancy still at call,
With seemly verse to greet the coming cheer;
Such grief to sooth, such airy hope to rear,
To sing the birth-song, or the funeral
Of such light love, it was a pleasant task;
But ill accord the quirks of wayward glee
That wears affliction for a wanton mask,
With woes that bear not Fancy's livery;
With Hope that scorns of Fate its fate to ask
But is itself its own sure destiny.

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"Too true it is my time of power was spent
In idly watering weeds of casual growth,
That wasted energy to desperate sloth
Declined, and fond self-seeking discontent;
That the huge debt for all that nature lent
I sought to cancel,—and was nothing loth,
To deem myself an outlaw, severed both
From duty and from hope,—yea, blindly sent
Without an errand where I would to stray:—
Too true it is, that knowing now my state,
I weakly mourn the sin I ought to hate,
Nor love the law I yet would fain obey:
But true it is, above all law and fate
Is Faith, abiding the appointed day.

"Long time a child, and still a child when years
Had painted manhood on my cheek, was I:
For yet I lived like one not born to die,
A thriftless prodigal of smiles and tears;
No hope I needed, and I knew no fears.
But sleep, though sweet, is only sleep, and waking,
I waked to sleep no more, at once o'ertaking
The vanguard of my age, with all arrears
Of duty on my back. Nor child, nor man,
Nor youth, nor sage, I find my head is grey,
For I have lost the race I never ran;
A rathe December blights my lagging May;
And still I am a child, tho' I be old,
Time is my debtor for my years untold."

Indeed, the whole series of sonnets with which the earliest and best work of Hartley began is (with a casual episode on others) mainly and essentially a series on himself. Perhaps there is something in the structure of the sonnet rather adapted to this species of composition. It is too short for narrative, too artificial for the intense passions, too complex for the simple, too elaborate for the domestic; but in an impatient world where there is not a premium on self-describing, who so would speak of himself must be wise

and brief, artful and composed—and in these respects he will be aided by the concise dignity of the tranquil sonnet.

It is remarkable that in this, too, Hartley Coleridge resembled his father. Turn over the early poems of S. T. Coleridge, the minor poems (we exclude "The Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel," which are his epics), but the small shreds which Bristol worshipped and Cottle paid for, and you will be disheartened by utter dulness. Taken on a decent average, and perhaps excluding a verse here and there, it really seems to us that they are inferior to the daily works of the undeserving and multiplied poets. If any reader will peruse any six of the several works intituled *Poems by a Young Gentleman*, we believe he will find the refined anonymity less insipid than the small productions of Samuel Taylor. There will be less puff and less ostentation. The reputation of the latter was caused not by their merit but by their time. Fifty years ago people believed in metre, and it is plain that Coleridge (Southey may be added, for that matter) believed in it also; the people in Bristol said that these two were wonderful men, because they had written wonderfully small verses;—and such is human vanity, that both for a time accepted the creed. In Coleridge, who had large speculative sense, the hallucination was not permanent—there are many traces that he rated his Juvenilia at their value; but poor Southey, who lived with domestic women, actually died in the delusion that his early works were perfect, except that he tried to "amend" the energy out of "Joan of Arc," which was the only good thing in it. His wife did not doubt that he had produced stupendous works. Why, then, should he? But experience has now shown that a certain metrical facility, and a pleasure in the metrical expression of certain sentiments, are in youth extremely common. Many years ago, Mr. Moore is reported to have remarked to Sir Walter Scott, that hardly a magazine was then published which did not

contain verses that would have made a sensation when they were young men. "Confound it, Tom," was the reply, "what luck it was *we* were born before all these fellows." And though neither Moore nor Scott are to be confounded with the nameless and industrious versifiers of the present day, yet it must be allowed that they owed to their time and their position—to the small quantity of rhyme in the market of the moment, and the extravagant appreciation of their early productions—much of that popular encouragement which induced them to labour upon more excellent compositions and to train themselves to write what they will be remembered by. But, dismissing these considerations, and returning to the minor poems of S. T. Coleridge, although we fearlessly assert that it is impossible for any sane man to set any value on—say the "Religious Musings"—an absurd attempt to versify an abstract theory, or the essay on the Pixies, who had more fun in them than the reader of it could suspect—it still is indisputable that scattered here and there through these poems, there are lines about himself (lines, as he said in later life, "in which the subjective object views itself subjectivo-objectively") which rank high in that form of art. Of this kind are the "Tombless Epitaph," for example, or the lines,—

> "To me hath Heaven with bounteous hand assigned
> Energic Reason and a shaping mind,
> The daring ken of truth; the Patriot's part,
> And Pity's sigh, that breathes the gentle heart;
> Sloth-jaundiced all! and from my graspless hand
> Drop friendship's priceless pearls, like hour-glass sand.
> I weep, yet stoop not! the faint anguish flows,
> A dreamy pang in morning's fev'rish doze;"[1]

and so on. In fact, it would appear that the tendency to, and the faculty for, self-delineation are very closely connected

[1] "Lines on a Friend" (November, 1794).

with the dreaminess of disposition and impotence of character which we spoke of just now. Persons very subject to these can grasp no external object, comprehend no external being; they can do no external thing, and therefore they are left to themselves. Their own character is the only one which they can view as a whole, or depict as a reality; of every other they may have glimpses, and acute glimpses, like the vivid truthfulness of particular dreams; but no settled appreciation, no connected development, no regular sequence whereby they may be exhibited on paper or conceived in the imagination. If other qualities are supposed to be identical, those will be most egotistical who only know themselves; the people who talk most of themselves will be those who talk best.

In the execution of minor verses, we think we could show that Hartley should have the praise of surpassing his father; but nevertheless it would be absurd, on a general view, to compare the two men. Samuel Taylor was so much bigger; what there was in his son was equally good, perhaps, but then there was not much of it; outwardly and inwardly he was essentially little. In poetry, for example, the father has produced two longish poems, which have worked themselves right down to the extreme depths of the popular memory, and stay there very firmly, in part from their strangeness, but in part from their power. Of Hartley, nothing of this kind is to be found—he could not write connectedly; he wanted steadiness of purpose, or efficiency of will, to write so voluntarily; and his genius did not, involuntarily, and out of its unseen workings, present him with continuous creations; on the contrary, his mind teemed with little fancies, and a new one came before the first had attained any enormous magnitude. As his brother observed, he wanted "back thought". "On what plan, Mr. Coleridge, are you arranging your books?" inquired a lady. "Plan, madam? I have no

plan: at first I had a principle; but then I had another, and now I do not know." The same contrast between the "shaping mind" of the father, and the gentle and minute genius of the son, is said to have been very plain in their conversation. That of Samuel Taylor was continuous, diffused, comprehensive.

> "Strongly it bears us along in swelling and limitless motion,
> Nothing before and nothing behind, but the sky and the ocean."

"Great talker, certainly," said Hazlitt, "*if* you will let him start from no *data*, and come to no conclusion." The talk of Hartley, on the contrary, though continuous in time, was detached in meaning; stating hints and observations on particular subjects; glancing lightly from side to side, but throwing no intense light on any, and exhausting none. It flowed gently over small doubts and pleasant difficulties, rippling for a minute sometimes into bombast, but lightly recovering and falling quietly in "melody back".

By way, it is likely, of compensation to Hartley for this great deficiency in what his father imagined to be his own *forte*—the power of conceiving a whole—Hartley possessed, in a considerable degree, a species of sensibility to which the former was nearly a stranger. "The mind of S. T. Coleridge," says one who had every means of knowing and observing, "was not in the least under the influence of external objects." Except in the writings produced during daily and confidential intimacy with Wordsworth (an exception that may be obviously accounted for), no trace can perhaps be found of any new image or metaphor from natural scenery. There is some story too of his going for the first time to York, and by the Minster, and never looking up at it. But Hartley's poems exhibit a great sensibility to a certain aspect of exterior nature, and great fanciful power of presenting that aspect in the most charming and attractive

forms. It is likely that the London boyhood of the elder Coleridge was,—added to a strong abstractedness which was born with him,—a powerful cause in bringing about the curious mental fact, that a great poet, so susceptible to every other species of refining and delightful feeling, should have been utterly destitute of any perception of beauty in landscape or nature. We must not forget that S. T. Coleridge was a bluecoat boy,—what do any of them know about fields? And similarly, we require in Hartley's case, before we can quite estimate his appreciation of nature, to consider his position, his circumstances, and especially his time.

Now it came to pass in those days that William Wordsworth went up into the hills. It has been attempted in recent years to establish that the object of his life was to teach Anglicanism. A whole life of him has been written by an official gentleman, with the apparent view of establishing that the great poet was a believer in rood-lofts, an idolater of piscinæ. But this is not capable of rational demonstration. Wordsworth, like Coleridge, began life as a heretic, and as the shrewd Pope unfallaciously said, "once a heretic, always a heretic". Sound men are sound from the first; safe men are safe from the beginning, and Wordsworth began wrong. His real reason for going to live in the mountains was certainly in part sacred, but it was not in the least Tractarian :—

> " For he with many feelings, many thoughts,
> Made up a meditative joy, and found
> Religious meanings in the forms of nature ".[1]

His whole soul was absorbed in the one idea, the one feeling, the one thought, of the sacredness of hills.

[1] Coleridge: " Fears in Solitude " (1798).

" Early had he learned
To reverence the volume that displays
The mystery, the life which cannot die;
But in the mountains did he *feel* his faith.
All things responsive to the writing, there
Breathed immortality, revolving life,
And greatness still revolving; infinite;
There littleness was not.

* * * * * *

" —In the after-day
Of boyhood, many an hour in caves forlorn,
And 'mid the hollow depths of naked crags,
He sate, and e'en in their fixed lineaments
Or from the power of a peculiar eye,
Or by creative feeling overborne,
Or by predominance of thought oppressed,
E'en in their fixed and steady lineaments
He traced an ebbing and a flowing mind,
Expression ever varying!" [1]

* * * * * *

" A sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
A motion and a spirit that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things." [2]

The defect of this religion is, that it is too abstract for the practical, and too bare for the musing. The worship of sensuous beauty—the southern religion—is of all sentiments the one most deficient in his writings. His poetry hardly even gives the charm, the entire charm, of the scenery in which he lived. The lighter parts are little noticed: the rugged parts protrude. The bare waste, the folding hill, the

[1] Wordsworth's " Excursion".
[2] " Tintern Abbey."

rough lake, Helvellyn with a brooding mist, Ulswater in a grey day: these are his subjects. He took a personal interest in the corners of the universe. There is a print of Rembrandt said to represent a piece of the Campagna, a mere waste, with a stump and a man, and under is written "Tacet et loquitur"; and thousands will pass the old print-shop where it hangs, and yet have a taste for paintings, and colours, and oils: but some fanciful students, some lonely stragglers, some long-haired enthusiasts, by chance will come, one by one, and look, and look, and be hardly able to take their eyes from the fascination, so massive is the shade, so still the conception, so firm the execution. Thus is it with Wordsworth and his poetry. *Tacet et loquitur.* Fashion apart, the million won't read it. Why should they?—they could not understand it. Don't put them out,—let them buy, and sell, and die;—but idle students, and enthusiastic wanderers, and solitary thinkers, will read, and read, and read, while their lives and their occupations hold. In truth, his works are the Scriptures of the intellectual life; for that same searching, and finding, and penetrating power which the real Scripture exercises on those engaged, as are the mass of men, in practical occupations and domestic ties, do his works exercise on the meditative, the solitary, and the young.

> "His daily teachers had been woods and rills,
> The silence that is in the starry sky,
> The sleep that is among the lonely hills"[1]

And he had more than others—

> "That blessed mood,
> In which the burthen of the mystery,
> In which the heavy and the weary weight
> Of all this unintelligible world
> Is lightened: that serene and blessed mood

[1] "Feast of Brougham Castle."

In which the affections gently lead us on,
Until the breath of this corporeal frame,
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul;
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things".[1]

And therefore he has had a whole host of sacred imitators. Mr. Keble, for example, has translated him for women. He has himself told us that he owed to Wordsworth the tendency *ad sanctiora* which is the mark of his own writings; and in fact he has but adapted the tone and habit of reverence which his master applied to common objects and the course of the seasons, to sacred objects and the course of the ecclesiastical year,—diffusing a mist of sentiment and devotion altogether delicious to a gentle and timid devotee. Hartley Coleridge is another translator. He has applied to the sensuous beauties and seductive parts of external nature the same *cultus* which Wordsworth applied to the bare and the abstract. It is—

"That fair beauty which no eye can see,
Of that sweet music which no ear can measure".[2]

It is, as it were, female beauty in wood and water; it is Rydal Water on a shining day; it is the gloss of the world with the knowledge that it is gloss: the sense of beauty, as in some women, with the feeling that yet it is hardly theirs:—

"The vale of Tempe had in vain been fair,
Green Ida never deemed the nurse of Jove,
Each fabled stream, beneath its covert grove,
Had idly murmured to the idle air;

[1] "Tintern Abbey." [2] Hartley Coleridge: "Sonnet".

The shaggy wolf had kept his horrid lair
In Delphi's cell and old Trophonius' cave,
And the wild wailing of the Ionian wave
Had never blended with the sweet despair
Of Sappho's death-song,—if the sight inspired
Saw only what the visual organs show;
If heaven-born phantasy no more required
Than what within the sphere of sense may grow.
The beauty to perceive of earthly things,
The mounting soul must heavenward prune her wings." [1]

And he knew it himself: he has sketched the essence of his works:—

"Whither is gone the wisdom and the power,
That ancient sages scattered with the notes
Of thought-suggesting lyres? The music floats
In the void air; e'en at this breathing hour,
In every cell and every blooming bower,
The sweetness of old lays is hovering still;
But the strong soul, the self-constraining will,
The rugged root that bare the winsome flower,
Is weak and withered. Were we like the Fays
That sweetly nestle in the fox-glove bells,
Or lurk and murmur in the rose-lipped shells
Which Neptune to the earth for quit-rent pays;
Then might our pretty modern Philomels
Sustain our spirits with their roundelays."

We had more to say of Hartley: we were to show that his "Prometheus" was defective; that its style had no Greek severity, no defined outline; that he was a critic as well as a poet, though in a small detached way, and what is odd enough, that he could criticise in rhyme. We were to make plain how his heart was in the right place, how his love-affairs were hopeless, how he was misled by his friends; but our time is done, and our space is full, and these topics must "go without day" of returning. We may end as we began.

[1] Hartley Coleridge: "Sonnet".

There are some that are bold and strong and incessant and energetic and hard, and to these is the world's glory; and some are timid and meek and impotent and cowardly and rejected and obscure. "One man esteemeth one day above another, another esteemeth every day alike." And so of Hartley, whom few regarded; he had a resource, the stillness of thought, the gentleness of musing, the peace of nature.

"To his side the fallow deer
Came and rested without fear;
The eagle, lord of land and sea,
Stooped down to pay him fealty;
And both the undying fish that swim,
In Bowscale-tarn did wait on him;
The pair were servants of his eye,
In their immortality;
And glancing, gleaming, dark or bright,
Moved to and fro for his delight.
He knew the rocks which Angels haunt
Upon the mountains visitant.
He hath kenned them taking wing,
And into caves where Fairies sing
He hath entered; and been told
By voices how men lived of old.
Among the heavens his eye can see
The face of thing that is to be,
And if that men report him right
His tongue could whisper words of might.
—Now another day is come,
Fitter hope and nobler doom,
He hath thrown aside his crook,
And hath buried deep his book." [1]

"And now the streams may sing for others' pleasure.
The hills sleep on in their eternity." [2]

He is gone from among them.

[1] "Feast of Brougham Castle."
[2] Hartley Coleridge: "Sonnet".

SHAKESPEARE—THE MAN.[1]

(1853.)

The greatest of English poets, it is often said, is but a name. "No letter of his writing, no record of his conversation, no character of him drawn with any fulness by a contemporary," have been extracted by antiquaries from the piles of rubbish which they have sifted. Yet of no person is there a clearer picture in the popular fancy. You seem to have known Shakespeare—to have seen Shakespeare—to have been friends with Shakespeare. We would attempt a slight delineation of the popular idea which has been formed, not from loose tradition or remote research, not from what some one says some one else said that the poet said, but from data which are at least undoubted, from the sure testimony of his certain works.

Some extreme sceptics, we know, doubt whether it is possible to deduce anything as to an author's character from his works. Yet surely people do not keep a tame steam-engine to write their books; and if those books were really written by a man, he must have been a man who could write them; he must have had the thoughts which they express, have acquired the knowledge they contain, have possessed the style in which we read them. The difficulty is a defect

[1] *Shakespeare et son Temps: Étude Littéraire.* Par M. Guizot. Paris, 1852.

Notes and Emendations to the Text of Shakespeare's Plays from early Manuscript Corrections in a Copy of the Folio, 1632, in the possession of R. Payne Collier, Esq., F.S.A. London, 1853.

of the critics. A person who knows nothing of an author he has read, will not know much of an author whom he has seen.

First of all, it may be said that Shakespeare's works could only be produced by a first-rate imagination working on a first-rate experience. It is often difficult to make out whether the author of a poetic creation is drawing from fancy, or drawing from experience; but for art on a certain scale, the two must concur. Out of nothing, nothing can be created. Some plastic power is required, however great may be the material. And when such works as "Hamlet" and "Othello," still more, when both they and others not unequal, have been created by a single mind, it may be fairly said, that not only a great imagination but a full conversancy with the world was necessary to their production. The whole powers of man under the most favourable circumstances, are not too great for such an effort. We may assume that Shakespeare had a great experience.

To a great experience one thing is essential, an experiencing nature. It is not enough to have opportunity, it is essential to feel it. Some occasions come to all men; but to many they are of little use, and to some they are none. What, for example, has experience done for the distinguished Frenchman, the name of whose essay is prefixed to this paper? M. Guizot is the same man that he was in 1820, or, we believe, as he was in 1814. Take up one of his lectures, published before he was a practical statesman; you will be struck with the width of view, the amplitude and the solidity of the reflections; you will be amazed that a mere literary teacher could produce anything so wise; but take up afterwards an essay published since his fall—and you will be amazed to find no more. Napoleon the First is come and gone—the Bourbons of the old *régime* have come and gone—the Bourbons of the new *régime* have had their turn.

M. Guizot has been first minister of a citizen king; he has led a great party; he has pronounced many a great *discours* that was well received by the second elective assembly in the world. But there is no trace of this in his writings. No one would guess from them that their author had ever left the professor's chair. It is the same, we are told, with small matters: when M. Guizot walks the street, he seems to see nothing; the head is thrown back, the eye fixed, and the mouth working. His mind is no doubt at work, but it is not stirred by what is external. Perhaps it is the internal activity of mind that overmasters the perceptive power. Anyhow there might have been an *émeute* in the street and he would not have known it; there have been revolutions in his life, and he is scarcely the wiser. Among the most frivolous and fickle of civilised nations he is alone. They pass from the game of war to the game of peace, from the game of science to the game of art, from the game of liberty to the game of slavery, from the game of slavery to the game of license; he stands like a schoolmaster in the playground, without sport and without pleasure, firm and sullen, slow and awful.

A man of this sort is a curious mental phenomenon. He appears to get early—perhaps to be born with—a kind of dry schedule or catalogue of the universe; he has a ledger in his head, and has a title to which he can refer any transaction; nothing puzzles him, nothing comes amiss to him, but he is not in the least the wiser for anything. Like the book-keeper, he has his heads of account, and he knows them, but he is no wiser for the particular items. After a busy day, and after a slow day, after a few entries, and after many, his knowledge is exactly the same: take his opinion of Baron Rothschild, he will say: "Yes, he keeps an account with us;" of Humphrey Brown: "Yes, we have that account, too". Just so with the class of minds which we are

speaking of, and in greater matters. Very early in life they come to a certain and considerable acquaintance with the world; they learn very quickly all they can learn, and naturally they never, in any way, learn any more. Mr. Pitt is, in this country, the type of the character. Mr. Alison, in a well-known passage, makes it a matter of wonder that he was fit to be a Chancellor of the Exchequer at twenty-three, and it *is* a great wonder. But it is to be remembered that he was no more fit at forty-three. As somebody said, he did not grow, he was cast. Experience taught him nothing, and he did not believe that he had anything to learn. The habit of mind in smaller degrees is not very rare, and might be illustrated without end. Hazlitt tells a story of West, the painter, that is in point: When some one asked him if he had ever been to Greece, he answered: "No; I have read a descriptive catalogue of the principal objects in that country, and I believe I am as well conversant with them as if I had visited it". No doubt he was just as well conversant, and so would be any *doctrinaire*.

But Shakespeare was not a man of this sort. If he walked down a street, he knew what was in that street. His mind did not form in early life a classified list of all the objects in the universe, and learn no more about the universe ever after. From a certain fine sensibility of nature, it is plain that he took a keen interest not only in the general and coarse outlines of objects, but in their minutest particulars and gentlest gradations. You may open Shakespeare and find the clearest proofs of this; take the following:—

> "When last the young Orlando parted from you,
> He left a promise to return again
> Within an hour; and, pacing through the forest,
> Chewing the food of sweet and bitter fancy,
> Lo, what befel! he threw his eye aside,
> And, mark, what object did present itself!

Under an oak, whose boughs were mossed with age.
And high top bald with dry antiquity,
A wretched ragged man, o'ergrown with hair,
Lay sleeping on his back: about his neck
A green and gilded snake had wreath'd itself,
Who with her head, nimble in threats, approach'd
The opening of his mouth; but suddenly
Seeing Orlando, it unlink'd itself,
And with indented glides did slip away
Into a bush: under which bush's shade
A lioness, with udders all drawn dry,
Lay crouching, head on ground, with cat-like watch,
When that the sleeping man should stir; for 'tis
The royal disposition of that beast,
To prey on nothing that doth seem as dead:
This seen," etc., etc. [1]

Or the more celebrated description of the hunt:—

"And when thou hast on foot the purblind hare,
Mark the poor wretch, to overshoot his troubles,
How he outruns the wind, and with what care
He cranks and crosses, with a thousand doubles:
The many musits through the which he goes
Are like a labyrinth to amaze his foes.

"Sometime he runs among a flock of sheep,
To make the cunning hounds mistake their smell,
And sometime where earth-delving conies keep,
To stop the loud pursuers in their yell;
And sometimes sorteth with a herd of deer;
Danger deviseth shifts; wit waits on fear:

"For thee his smell with others being mingled,
The hot scent-snuffing hounds are driven to doubt,
Ceasing their clamorous cry, till they have singled,
With much ado, the cold fault cleanly out;
Then do they spend their mouths: Echo replies
As if another chase were in the skies.

[1] "As You Like It," iv. 3.

"By this, poor Wat, far off, upon a hill,
Stands on his hinder legs with listening ear,
To harken if his foes pursue him still;
Anon their loud alarums he doth hear;
And now his grief may be compared well
To one sore sick that hears the passing bell.

"Then thou shalt see the dew-bedaddled wretch
Turn and return, indenting with the way;
Each envious briar his weary legs doth scratch,
Each shadow makes him stop, each murmur stay:
For misery is trodden on by many,
And being low, never relieved by any."[1]

It is absurd, by the way, to say we know *nothing* about the man who wrote that; we know that he had been after a hare. It is idle to allege that mere imagination would tell him that a hare is apt to run among a flock of sheep, or that its so doing disconcerts the scent of hounds. But no single citation really represents the power of the argument. Set descriptions may be manufactured to order, and it does not follow that even the most accurate or successful of them was really the result of a thorough and habitual knowledge of the object. A man who knows little of Nature may write one excellent delineation, as a poor man may have one bright guinea. Real opulence consists in having many. What truly indicates excellent knowledge, is the habit of constant, sudden, and almost unconscious allusion, which implies familiarity, for it can arise from that alone,—and this very species of incidental, casual, and perpetual reference to "the mighty world of eye and ear,"[2] is the particular characteristic of Shakespeare.

In this respect Shakespeare had the advantage of one whom, in many points, he much resembled—Sir Walter Scott. For a great poet, the organisation of the latter was very blunt; he had no sense of smell, little sense of taste,

[1] "Venus and Adonis." [2] Wordsworth: "Tintern Abbey".

almost no ear for music (he knew a few, perhaps three, Scotch tunes, which he avowed that he had learnt in sixty years, by hard labour and mental association), and not much turn for the minutiæ of Nature in any way. The effect of this may be seen in some of the best descriptive passages of his poetry, and we will not deny that it does (although proceeding from a sensuous defect), in a certain degree, add to their popularity. He deals with the main outlines and great points of Nature, never attends to any others, and in this respect he suits the comprehension and knowledge of many who know only those essential and considerable outlines. Young people, especially, who like big things, are taken with Scott, and bored by Wordsworth, who knew too much. And after all, the two poets are in proper harmony, each with his own scenery. Of all beautiful scenery the Scotch is the roughest and barest, as the English is the most complex and cultivated. What a difference is there between the minute and finished delicacy of Rydal Water and the rough simplicity of Loch Katrine! It is the beauty of civilisation beside the beauty of barbarism. Scott has himself pointed out the effect of this on arts and artists.

> "Or see yon weather-beaten hind,
> Whose sluggish herds before him wind,
> Whose tattered plaid and rugged cheek
> His Northern clime and kindred speak;
> Through England's laughing meads he goes,
> And England's wealth around him flows;
> Ask if it would content him well,
> At ease in those gay plains to dwell,
> Where hedgerows spread a verdant screen,
> And spires and forests intervene,
> And the neat cottage peeps between?
> No, not for these would he exchange
> His dark Lochaber's boundless range,
> Not for fair Devon's meads forsake
> Ben Nevis grey and Garry's lake.

" Thus while I ape the measures wild
Of tales that charmed me yet a child,
Rude though they be, still, with the chime,
Return the thoughts of early time;
And feelings roused in life's first day,
Glow in the line and prompt the lay.
Then rise those crags, that mountain tower,
Which charmed my fancy's wakening hour.
Though no broad river swept along,
To claim perchance heroic song;
Though sighed no groves in summer gale,
To prompt of love a softer tale;
Though scarce a puny streamlet's speed
Claimed homage from a shepherd's reed,
Yet was poetic impulse given
By the green hill and clear blue heaven.
It was a barren scene and wild,
Where naked cliffs were rudely piled,
But ever and anon between,
Lay velvet tufts of loveliest green;
And well the lonely infant knew
Recesses where the wallflower grew,
And honeysuckle loved to crawl
Up the low crag and ruined wall.

. . . . . .

" From me, thus nurtured, dost thou ask
The classic poet's well-conned task?
Nay, Erskine, nay—On the wild hill
Let the wild heathbell flourish still;
Cherish the tulip, prune the vine,
But freely let the woodbine twine,
And leave untrimmed the eglantine.
Nay, my friend, nay—Since oft thy praise
Hath given fresh vigour to my lays,
Since oft thy judgment could refine
My flattened thought or cumbrous line,
Still kind, as is thy wont, attend,
And in the minstrel spare the friend.
Though wild as cloud, as stream, as gale,
Flow forth, flow unrestrained, my tale." [1]

[1] " Marmion," Introduction to canto iii.

And this is wise, for there is beauty in the North as well as in the South. Only it is to be remembered that the beauty of the Trossachs is the result of but a few elements—say birch and brushwood, rough hills and narrow dells, much heather and many stones—while the beauty of England is one thing in one district and one in another; is here the combination of one set of qualities, and there the harmony of opposite ones, and is everywhere made up of many details and delicate refinements; all which require an exquisite delicacy of perceptive organisation, a seeing eye, a minutely hearing ear. Scott's is the strong admiration of a rough mind; Shakespeare's, the nice minuteness of a susceptible one.

A perfectly poetic appreciation of nature contains two elements, a knowledge of facts, and a sensibility to charms. Everybody who may have to speak to some naturalists will be well aware how widely the two may be separated. He will have seen that a man may study butterflies and forget that they are beautiful, or be perfect in the "Lunar theory" without knowing what most people mean by the moon. Generally such people prefer the stupid parts of nature—worms and Cochin-China fowls. But Shakespeare was not obtuse. The lines—

> "Daffodils
> That come before the swallow dares, and take
> The winds of March with beauty; violets dim,
> But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
> Or Cytherea's breath,"[1]

seem to show that he knew those feelings of youth, to which beauty is more than a religion.

In his mode of delineating natural objects Shakespeare is curiously opposed to Milton. The latter, who was still by

[1] "A Winter's Tale." IV. 3.

temperament, and a schoolmaster by trade, selects a beautiful object, puts it straight out before him and his readers, and accumulates upon it all the learned imagery of a thousand years; Shakespeare glances at it and says something of his own. It is not our intention to say that, as a describer of the external world, Milton is inferior; in *set* description we rather think that he is the better. We only wish to contrast the mode in which the delineation is effected. The one is like an artist who dashes off any number of picturesque sketches at any moment; the other like a man who has lived at Rome, has undergone a thorough training, and by deliberate and conscious effort, after a long study of the best masters, can produce a few great pictures. Milton, accordingly, as has been often remarked, is careful in the choice of his subjects; he knows too well the value of his labour to be very ready to squander it; Shakespeare, on the contrary, describes anything that comes to hand, for he is prepared for it whatever it may be, and what he paints he paints without effort. Compare any passage from Shakespeare—for example, those quoted before—and the following passage from Milton:—

"Southward through Eden went a river large,
Nor changed its course, but through the shaggy hill
Passed underneath ingulfed; for God had thrown
That mountain as His garden mould, high raised
Upon the rapid current, which through veins
Of porous earth, with kindly thirst up-drawn,
Rose a fresh fountain, and with many a rill
Watered the garden; thence united fell
Down the steep glade, and met the nether flood,
Which from its darksome passage now appears
And now divided into four main streams
Runs diverse, wandering many a famous realm
And country, whereof here needs no account;
But rather to tell how,—if art could tell,—
How from that sapphire fount the crispèd brooks,

Rolling on orient pearl and sands of gold,
With mazy error under pendent shades
Ran nectar, visiting each plant; and fed
Flowers worthy of Paradise, which not nice art
In beds and curious knots, but Nature boon
Poured forth profuse on hill, and dale, and plain,
Both where the morning sun first warmly smote
The open field, and where the unpierced shade
Imbrowned the noontide bowers. Thus was this place
A happy rural seat of various view;
Groves whose rich trees wept odorous gums and balm;
Others whose fruit, burnished with golden rind,
Hung amiable (Hesperian fables true,
If true, here only), and of delicious taste:
Betwixt them lawns, or level downs, and flocks
Grazing the tender herb, were interposed:
Or palmy hillock, or the flowery lap
Of some irriguous valley spread her store;
Flowers of all hue, and without thorn the rose."[1]

Why, you could draw a map of it. It is *not* "Nature boon," but "nice art in beds and curious knots"; it is exactly the old (and excellent) style of artificial gardening, by which any place can be turned into trim hedgerows, and stiff borders, and comfortable shades; but there are no straight lines in Nature or Shakespeare. Perhaps the contrast may be accounted for by the way in which the two poets acquired their knowledge of scenes and scenery. We think we demonstrated before that Shakespeare was a sportsman, but if there be still a sceptic or a dissentient, let him read the following remarks on dogs:—

"My hounds are bred out of the Spartan kind,
So flewed, so sanded; and their heads are hung
With ears that sweep away the morning dew,
Crook-kneed and dewlapped like Thessalian bulls;

[1] *Paradise Lost*, book iv.

> Slow in pursuit, but matched in mouth like bells,
> Each under each. A cry more tunable
> Was never holloa'd to nor cheered with horn
> In Crete, in Sparta, nor in Thessaly."[1]

"Judge when you hear."[2] It is evident that the man who wrote this was a judge of dogs, was an out-of-door sporting man, full of natural sensibility, not defective in "daintiness of ear," and above all things, apt to cast on Nature random, sportive, half-boyish glances, which reveal so much, and bequeath such abiding knowledge. Milton, on the contrary, went out to see Nature. He left a narrow cell, and the intense study which was his "portion in this life," to take a slow, careful, and reflective walk. In his treatise on education he has given us his notion of the way in which young people should be familiarised with natural objects. "But," he remarks, "to return to our institute; besides these constant exercises at home, there is another opportunity of gaining pleasure from pleasure itself abroad; in those vernal seasons of the year when the air is calm and pleasant, it were an injury and sullenness against Nature, not to go out and see her riches and partake in her rejoicing in heaven and earth. I should not therefore be a persuader to them of studying much in these, after two or three years, that they have well laid their grounds, but to ride out in companies, with prudent and staid guides, to all quarters of the land; learning and observing all places of strength, all commodities of building and of soil, for towns and tillage, harbours and ports of trade. Sometimes taking sea as far as our navy, to learn there also what they can in the practical knowledge of sailing and of sea-fight." Fancy "the prudent and staid guides". What a machinery for making pedants. Perhaps Shakespeare would have known that the conversation would be in this sort: "I say, Shallow, that

[1] "Midsummer Night's Dream," iv. 1. [2] *Ibid.*, next line.

mare is going in the knees. She has never been the same since you larked her over the fivebar, while Moleyes was talking clay and agriculture. I do not hate Latin so much, but I hate 'argillaceous earth'; and what use is *that* to a fellow in the Guards, *I* should like to know?" Shakespeare had himself this sort of boyish buoyancy. He was not "one of the staid guides". We might further illustrate it. Yet this would be tedious enough, and we prefer to go on and show what we mean by an experiencing nature in relation to men and women, just as we have striven to indicate what it is in relation to horses and hares.

The reason why so few good books are written, is that so few people that can write know anything. In general an author has always lived in a room, has read books, has cultivated science, is acquainted with the style and sentiments of the best authors, but he is out of the way of employing his own eyes and ears. He has nothing to hear and nothing to see. His life is a vacuum. The mental habits of Robert Southey, which about a year ago were so extensively praised in the public journals, are the type of literary existence, just as the praise bestowed on them shows the admiration excited by them among literary people. He wrote poetry (as if anybody could) before breakfast; he read during breakfast. He wrote history until dinner; he corrected proofsheets between dinner and tea; he wrote an essay for the *Quarterly* afterwards; and after supper, by way of relaxation, composed the "Doctor"—a lengthy and elaborate jest. Now, what can any one think of such a life—except how clearly it shows that the habits best fitted for communicating information, formed with the best care, and daily regulated by the best motives, are exactly the habits which are likely to afford a man the least information to communicate. Southey had no events, no experiences. His wife kept house and allowed him pocket-money, just as if he had been a

German professor devoted to accents, tobacco, and the dates of Horace's amours. And it is pitiable to think that so meritorious a life was only made endurable by a painful delusion. He thought that day by day, and hour by hour, he was accumulating stores for the instruction and entertainment of a long posterity. His epics were to be in the hands of all men, and his history of Brazil, the " Herodotus of the South American Republics ". As if his epics were not already dead, and as if the people who now cheat at Valparaiso care a *real* who it was that cheated those before them. Yet it was only by a conviction like this that an industrious and caligraphic man (for such was Robert Southey), who might have earned money as a clerk, worked all his days for half a clerk's wages, at occupation much duller and more laborious. The critic in *The Vicar of Wakefield* lays down that you should *always* say that the picture would have been better if the painter had taken more pains; but in the case of the practised literary man, you should often enough say that the writings would have been much better if the writer had taken less pains. He says he has devoted his life to the subject—the reply is: " Then you have taken the best way to prevent your making anything of it ". Instead of reading studiously what Burgersdicius and Ænœsidemus said men were, you should have gone out yourself, and seen (if you can see) what they are.

After all, the original way of writing books may turn out to be the best. The first author, it is plain, could not have taken anything from books, since there were no books for him to copy from; he looked at things for himself. Anyhow, the modern system fails, for where are the amusing books from voracious students and habitual writers? Not that we mean exactly to say that an author's hard reading is the cause of his writing that which is hard to read. This would be near the truth, but not quite the truth. The two are con-

comitant effects of a certain defective nature. Slow men read well, but write ill. The abstracted habit, the want of keen exterior interests, the aloofness of mind from what is next it, all tend to make a man feel an exciting curiosity and interest about remote literary events, the toil of scholastic logicians, and the petty feuds of Argos and Lacedæmon; but they also tend to make a man very unable to explain and elucidate those exploits for the benefit of his fellows. What separates the author from his readers, will make it proportionably difficult for him to explain himself to them. Secluded habits do not tend to eloquence; and the indifferent apathy which is so common in studious persons is exceedingly unfavourable to the liveliness of narration and illustration which is needed for excellence in even the simpler sorts of writing. Moreover, in general it will perhaps be found that persons devoted to mere literature commonly become devoted to mere idleness. They wish to produce a great work, but they find they cannot. Having relinquished everything to devote themselves to this, they conclude on trial that this is impossible. They wish to write, but nothing occurs to them. Therefore they write nothing, and they do nothing. As has been said, they have nothing to do. Their life has no events, unless they are very poor. With any decent means of subsistence, they have nothing to rouse them from an indolent and musing dream. A merchant must meet his bills, or he is civilly dead and uncivilly remembered. But a student may know nothing of time and be too lazy to wind up his watch. In the retired citizen's journal in Addison's *Spectator*, we have the type of this way of spending the time: Mem. Morning 8 to 9, "Went into the parlour and tied on my shoe-buckles". This is the sort of life for which studious men commonly relinquish the pursuits of business and the society of their fellows.

Yet all literary men are not tedious, neither are they all

slow. One great example even these most tedious times have luckily given us, to show us what may be done by a really great man even now, the same who before served as an illustration—Sir Walter Scott. In his lifetime people denied he was a poet, but nobody said that he was not "the best fellow" in Scotland—perhaps that was not much—or that he had not more wise joviality, more living talk, more graphic humour, than any man in Great Britain. "Wherever we went," said Mr. Wordsworth, "we found his name acted as an *open sesame*, and I believe that in the character of the *sheriff's* friends, we might have counted on a hearty welcome under any roof in the border country." Never neglect to talk to people with whom you are casually thrown, was his precept, and he exemplified the maxim himself. "I believe," observes his biographer, "that Scott has somewhere expressed in print his satisfaction, that amid all the changes of our manners, the ancient freedom of personal intercourse may still be indulged between a master and an *out-of-door* servant; but in truth he kept by the old fashion, even with domestic servants, to an extent which I have hardly ever seen practised by any other gentleman. He conversed with his coachman if he sat by him, as he often did, on the box—with his footman, if he chanced to be in the rumble. Indeed, he did not confine his humanity to his own people; any steady-going servant of a friend of his was soon considered as a sort of friend too, and was sure to have a kind little colloquy to himself at coming or going." "Sir Walter speaks to every man as if he was his blood relation," was the expressive comment of one of these dependants. It was in this way that he acquired the great knowledge of various kinds of men, which is so clear and conspicuous in his writings; nor could that knowledge have been acquired on easier terms, or in any other way. No man could describe the character of Dandie Dinmont, without having

been in Lidderdale. Whatever has been once in a book may be put into a book again; but an original character, taken at first hand from the sheepwalks and from Nature, must be seen in order to be known. A man, to be able to describe—indeed, to be able to know—various people in life, must be able at sight to comprehend their essential features, to know how they shade one into another, to see how they diversify the common uniformity of civilised life. Nor does this involve simply intellectual or even imaginative prerequisites, still less will it be facilitated by exquisite senses or subtle fancy. What is wanted is, to be able to appreciate mere clay—which mere mind never will. If you will describe the people,—nay, if you will write for the people, you must be one of the people. You must have led their life, and must wish to lead their life. However strong in any poet may be the higher qualities of abstract thought or conceiving fancy, unless he can actually sympathise with those around him, he can never describe those around him. Any attempt to produce a likeness of what is not really *liked* by the person who is describing it, will end in the creation of what may be correct, but is not living—of what may be artistic, but is likewise artificial.

Perhaps this is the defect of the works of the greatest dramatic genius of recent times—Goethe. His works are too much in the nature of literary studies; the mind is often deeply impressed by them, but one doubts if the author was. He saw them as he saw the houses of Weimar and the plants in the act of metamorphosis. He had a clear perception of their fixed condition and their successive transitions, but he did not really (if we may so speak) comprehend their motive power. So to say, he appreciated their life, but not their liveliness. Niebuhr, as is well known, compared the most elaborate of Goethe's works—the novel *Wilhelm Meister*—to a menagerie of tame animals, meaning thereby, as we

believe, to express much the same distinction. He felt that there was a deficiency in mere vigour and rude energy. We have a long train and no engine—a great accumulation of excellent matter, arranged and ordered with masterly skill, but not animated with over-buoyant and unbounded play. And we trace this not to a defect in imaginative power, a defect which it would be a simple absurdity to impute to Goethe, but to the tone of his character and the habits of his mind. He moved hither and thither through life, but he was always a man apart. He mixed with unnumbered kinds of men, with courts and academies, students and women, camps and artists, but everywhere he was with them, yet not of them. In every scene he was there, and he made it clear that he was there with a reserve and as a stranger. He went there *to experience*. As a man of universal culture and well skilled in the order and classification of human life, the fact of any one class or order being beyond his reach or comprehension seemed an absurdity, and it was an absurdity. He thought that he was equal to moving in any description of society, and he was equal to it; but then on that exact account he was absorbed in none. There were none of surpassing and immeasurably preponderating captivation. No scene and no subject were to him what Scotland and Scotch nature were to Sir Walter Scott. "If I did not see the heather once a year, I should die," said the latter; but Goethe would have lived without it, and it would not have cost him much trouble. In every one of Scott's novels there is always the spirit of the old moss trooper—the flavour of the ancient border; there is the intense sympathy which enters into the most living moments of the most living characters—the lively energy which *becomes* the energy of the most vigorous persons delineated. "Marmion" was "written" while he was galloping on horseback. It reads as if it were so.

Now it appears that Shakespeare not only had that various commerce with, and experience of men, which was common both to Goethe and to Scott, but also that he agrees with the latter rather than with the former in the kind and species of that experience. He was not merely with men, but of men; he was not a "thing apart," [1] with a clear intuition of what was in those around him; he had in his own nature the germs and tendencies of the very elements that he described. He knew what was in man, for he felt it in himself. Throughout all his writings you see an amazing sympathy with common people, rather an excessive tendency to dwell on the common features of ordinary lives. You feel that common people could have been cut out of him, but not without his feeling it; for it would have deprived him of a very favourite subject—of a portion of his ideas to which he habitually recurred.

"*Leon.* What would you with me, honest neighbour?

Dog. Marry, sir, I would have some confidence with you, that decerns you nearly.

Leon. Brief, I pray you; for you see 'tis a busy time with me.

Dog. Marry, this it is, sir.

Verg. Yes, in truth it is, sir.

Leon. What is it, my good friends?

Dog. Goodman Verges, sir, speaks a little off the matter: an old man, sir, and his wits are not so blunt, as, God help, I would desire they were; but, in faith, honest as the skin between his brows.

Verg. Yes, I thank God, I am as honest as any man living, that is an old man, and no honester than I.

Dog. Comparisons are odorous:—*palabras*, neighbour Verges.

Leon. Neighbours, you are tedious.

Dog. It pleases your worship to say so, but we are the poor duke's officers; but, truly, for mine own part, if I were as tedious as a king, I could find in my heart to bestow it all of your worship.

. . . . . .

Leon. I would fain know what you have to say.

Verg. Marry, sir, our watch to-night, excepting your worship's presence, have ta'en a couple of as arrant knaves as any in Messina.

[1] Byron: "Don Juan," i., cxciv.

Dog. A good old man, sir; he will be talking; as they say, When the age is in, the wit is out; God help us! it is a world to see!—Well said, i' faith, neighbour Verges:—well, God's a good man; an two men ride of a horse, one must ride behind:—An honest soul, i' faith, sir; by my troth he is, as ever broke bread; but God is to be worshipped: All men are not alike; alas, good neighbour!

Leon. Indeed, neighbour, he comes too far short of you.

Dog. Gifts that God gives,"—etc., etc.[1]

"*Stafford.* Ay, sir.

Cade. By her he had two children at one birth.

Staff. That's false.

Cade. Ay, there's the question; but, I say, 'tis true:

> The elder of them, being put to nurse,
> Was by a beggar-woman stol'n away:
> And, ignorant of his birth and parentage,
> Became a bricklayer, when he came to age;
> His son am I; deny it, if you can.

Dick. Nay, 'tis too true; therefore he shall be king.

Smith. Sir, he made a chimney in my father's house, and the bricks are alive at this day to testify it; therefore, deny it not."[2]

Shakespeare was too wise not to know that for most of the purposes of human life stupidity is a most valuable element. He had nothing of the impatience which sharp logical narrow minds habitually feel when they come across those who do not apprehend their quick and precise deductions. No doubt he talked to the stupid players, to the stupid door-keeper, to the property man, who considers paste jewels "very preferable, besides the expense"—talked with the stupid apprentices of stupid Fleet Street, and had much pleasure in ascertaining what was their notion of "King Lear". In his comprehensive mind it was enough if every man hitched well into his own place in human life. If every one were logical and literary, how would there be scavengers,

[1] "Much Ado about Nothing," iii. 5.

[2] "2 King Henry VI.," iv. 2.

or watchmen, or caulkers, or coopers? Narrow minds will be "subdued to what" they "work in". The "dyer's hand"[1] will not more clearly carry off its tint, nor will what is moulded more precisely indicate the confines of the mould. A patient sympathy, a kindly fellow-feeling for the narrow intelligence necessarily induced by narrow circumstances—a narrowness which, in some degrees, seems to be inevitable, and is perhaps more serviceable than most things to the wise conduct of life—this, though quick and half-bred minds may despise it, seems to be a necessary constituent in the composition of manifold genius. "How shall the world be served?" asks the host in Chaucer. We must have cart-horses as well as race-horses, draymen as well as poets. It is no bad thing, after all, to be a slow man and to have one idea a year. You don't make a figure, perhaps, in argumentative society, which requires a quicker species of thought, but is that the worse?

"*Hol. Via*, Goodman Dull; thou hast spoken no word all this while.

Dull. Nor understood none either, sir.

Hol. Allons, we will employ thee.

Dull. I'll make one in a dance or so, or I will play on the tabor to the worthies, and let them dance the hay.

Hol. Most dull, honest Dull, to our sport away."[2]

And such, we believe, was the notion of Shakespeare.

S. T. Coleridge has a nice criticism which bears on this point. He observes that in the narrations of uneducated people in Shakespeare, just as in real life, there is a want of prospectiveness and a superfluous amount of regressiveness. People of this sort are unable to look a long way in front of them, and they wander from the right path. They get on too fast with one half, and then the other hopelessly lags. They can tell a story exactly as it is told to them (as an

[1] Shakespeare: "Sonnet," cxi.

[2] "Love's Labour's Lost," v. 1.

animal can go step by step where it has been before), but they can't calculate its bearings beforehand, or see how it is to be adapted to those to whom they are speaking, nor do they know how much they have thoroughly told and how much they have not. "I went up the street, then I went down the street; no, first went down and then—but you do not follow me; I go before you, sir." Thence arises the complex style usually adopted by persons not used to narration. They tumble into a story and get on as they can. This is scarcely the sort of thing which a man could foresee. Of course a metaphysician can account for it, and, like Coleridge, assure you that if he had not observed it, he could have predicted it in a moment; but, nevertheless, it is too refined a conclusion to be made out from known premises by common reasoning. Doubtless there is some reason why negroes have woolly hair (and if you look into a philosophical treatise, you will find that the author could have made out that it would be so, if he had not, by a mysterious misfortune, known from infancy that it was the fact),—still one could never have supposed it oneself. And in the same manner, though the profounder critics may explain in a satisfactory and refined manner, how the confused and undulating style of narration is peculiarly incident to the mere multitude, yet it is most likely that Shakespeare derived his acquaintance with it from the fact, from actual hearing, and not from what may be the surer, but is the slower, process of metaphysical deduction. The best passage to illustrate this is that in which the nurse gives a statement of Juliet's age; but it will not exactly suit our pages. The following of Mrs. Quickly will suffice:—

"Tilly-fally, Sir John, never tell me; your ancient swaggerer comes not in my doors. I was before Master Tizzick, the Deputy, the other day; and, as he said to me,—it was no longer ago than Wednesday last,—Neighbour Quickly, says he;—Master Dumb, our minister, was by

then;—Neighbour Quickly, says he, receive those that are civil; for, saith he, you are in an ill name:—now, he said so, I can tell you whereupon; for, says he, you are an honest woman, and well thought on; therefore take heed to what guests you receive: Receive, says he, no swaggering companions.—There comes none here;—you would bless you to hear what he said:—no, I'll no swaggerers." [1]

Now, it is quite impossible that this, any more than the political reasoning on the parentage of Cade, which was cited before, should have been written by one not habitually and sympathisingly conversant with the talk of the illogical classes. Shakespeare felt, if we may say so, the force of the bad reasoning. He did not, like a sharp logician, angrily detect a flaw, and set it down as a fallacy of reference or a fallacy of amphibology. This is not the English way, though Dr. Whately's logic has been published so long (and, as he says himself, must now be deemed to be irrefutable, since no one has ever offered any refutation of it). Yet still people in this country do not like to be committed to distinct premises. They like a Chancellor of the Exchequer to say: "It has during very many years been maintained by the honourable member for Montrose that two and two make four, and I am free to say, that I think there is a great deal to be said in favour of that opinion; but, without committing her Majesty's Government to that proposition as an abstract sentiment, I will go so far as to assume two and two are not sufficient to make five, which with the permission of the House, will be a sufficient basis for all the operations which I propose to enter upon during the present year". We have no doubt Shakespeare reasoned in that way himself. Like any other Englishman, when he had a clear course before him, he rather liked to shuffle over little hitches in the argument, and on that account he had a great sympathy with those who did so too. He would never have interrupted

[1] "2 King Henry VI.," ii. 4.

Mrs. Quickly; he saw that her mind was going to and fro over the subject; he saw that it was coming right, and this was enough for him, and will be also enough of this topic for our readers.

We think we have proved that Shakespeare had an enormous specific acquaintance with the common people; that this can only be obtained by sympathy. It likewise has a further condition.

In spiritedness, the style of Shakespeare is very like to that of Scott. The description of a charge of cavalry in Scott reads, as was said before, as if it was written on horseback. A play by Shakespeare reads as if it were written in a playhouse. The great critics assure you that a theatrical audience must be kept awake, but Shakespeare knew this of his own knowledge. When you read him, you feel a sensation of motion, a conviction that there is something "up," a notion that not only is something being talked about, but also that something is being done. We do not imagine that Shakespeare owed this quality to his being a player, but rather that he became a player because he possessed this quality of mind. For after, and notwithstanding, everything which has been, or may be, said against the theatrical profession, it certainly does require from those who pursue it a certain quickness and liveliness of mind. Mimics are commonly an elastic sort of persons, and it takes a little levity of disposition to enact even the "heavy fathers". If a boy joins a company of strolling players, you may be sure that he is not a "good boy"; he may be a trifle foolish, or a thought romantic, but certainly he is not slow. And this was in truth the case with Shakespeare. They say, too, that in the beginning he was a first-rate link-boy; and the tradition is affecting, though we fear it is not quite certain. Anyhow, you feel about Shakespeare that he could have been a link-boy. In the same way you feel he may have been a player. You are sure at once that he could not have followed any sedentary kind of life. But

wheresoever there was anything *acted* in earnest or in jest, by way of mock representation or by way of serious reality, there he found matter for his mind. If anybody could have any doubt about the liveliness of Shakespeare, let them consider the character of Falstaff. When a man has created *that* without a capacity for laughter, then a blind man may succeed in describing colours. Intense animal spirits are the single sentiment (if they be a sentiment) of the entire character. If most men were to save up all the gaiety of their whole lives, it would come about to the gaiety of one speech in Falstaff. A morose man might have amassed many jokes, might have observed many details of jovial society, might have conceived a Sir John, marked by rotundity of body, but could hardly have imagined what we call his rotundity of mind. We mean that the animal spirits of Falstaff give him an easy, vague, diffusive sagacity which is peculiar to him. A morose man, Iago, for example, may know anything, and is apt to know a good deal; but what he knows is generally all in corners. He knows number 1, number 2, number 3, and so on, but there is not anything continuous, or smooth, or fluent in his knowledge. Persons conversant with the works of Hazlitt will know in a minute what we mean. Everything which he observed he seemed to observe from a certain soreness of mind; he looked at people because they offended him; he had the same vivid notion of them that a man has of objects which grate on a wound in his body. But there is nothing at all of this in Falstaff; on the contrary, everything pleases him, and everything is food for a joke. Cheerfulness and prosperity give an easy abounding sagacity of mind which nothing else does give. Prosperous people bound easily over all the surface of things which their lives present to them; very likely they keep to the surface; there are things beneath or above to which they may not penetrate or attain, but what is on any part of the surface, that they know well. "Lift not the painted veil which those who live call life," [1] and

[1] Shelley: "Sonnet" (1818).

they do not lift it. What is sublime or awful above, what is "sightless and drear"[1] beneath,—these they may not dream of. Nor is any one piece or corner of life so well impressed on them as on minds less happily constituted. It is only people who have had a tooth out, that really know the dentist's waiting-room. Yet such people, for the time at least, know nothing but that and their tooth. The easy and sympathising friend who accompanies them knows everything; hints gently at the contents of the *Times*, and would cheer you with Lord Palmerston's replies. So, on a greater scale, the man of painful experience knows but too well what has hurt him, and where and why; but the happy have a vague and rounded view of the round world, and such was the knowledge of Falstaff.

It is to be observed that these high spirits are not a mere excrescence or superficial point in an experiencing nature; on the contrary, they seem to be essential, if not to its idea or existence, at least to its exercise and employment. How are you to know people without talking to them, but how are you to talk to them without tiring yourself? A common man is exhausted in half an hour; Scott or Shakespeare could have gone on for a whole day. This is, perhaps, peculiarly necessary for a painter of English life. The basis of our national character seems to be a certain energetic humour, which may be found in full vigour in old Chaucer's time, and in great perfection in at least one of the popular writers of this age, and which is, perhaps, most easily described by the name of our greatest painter—Hogarth. It is amusing to see how entirely the efforts of critics and artists fail to naturalise in England any other sort of painting. Their efforts are fruitless; for the people painted are not English people: they may be Italians, or Greeks, or Jews, but it is quite certain that they are foreigners. We should not fancy that modern art ought to resemble the mediæval. So long as artists attempt the same

[1] Shelley: "Sonnet" (1818).

class of paintings as Raphael, they will not only be inferior to Raphael, but they will never please, as they might please, the English people. What we want is what Hogarth gave us—a representation of ourselves. It may be that we are wrong, that we ought to prefer something of the old world, some scene in Rome or Athens, some tale from Carmel or Jerusalem; but, after all, we do not. These places are, we think, abroad, and had their greatness in former times; we wish a copy of what now exists, and of what we have seen. London we know, and Manchester we know, but where are all these? It is the same with literature, Milton excepted, and even Milton can hardly be called a popular writer; all great English writers describe English people, and in describing them, they give, as they must give, a large comic element; and, speaking generally, this is scarcely possible, except in the case of cheerful and easy-living men. There is, no doubt, a biting satire, like that of Swift, which has for its essence misanthropy. There is the mockery of Voltaire, which is based on intellectual contempt; but this is not our English humour—it is not that of Shakespeare and Falstaff; ours is the humour of a man who laughs when he speaks, of flowing enjoyment, of an experiencing nature.

Yet it would be a great error if we gave anything like an exclusive prominence to this aspect of Shakespeare. Thus he appeared to those around him—in some degree they knew that he was a cheerful, and humorous, and happy man; but of his higher gift they knew less than we. A great painter of men must (as has been said) have a faculty of conversing, but he must also have a capacity for solitude. There is much of mankind that a man can only learn from himself. Behind every man's external life, which he leads in company, there is another which he leads alone, and which he carries with him apart. We see but one aspect of our neighbour, as we see but one side of the moon; in either case there is also a dark half,

which is unknown to us. We all come down to dinner, but each has a room to himself. And if we would study the internal lives of others, it seems essential that we should begin with our own. If we study this our *datum*, if we attain to see and feel how this influences and evolves itself in our social and (so to say) public life, then it is possible that we may find in the lives of others the same or analogous features; and if we do not, then at least we may suspect that those who want them are deficient likewise in the secret agencies which we feel produce them in ourselves. The metaphysicians assert, that people originally picked up the idea of the existence of other people in this way. It is orthodox doctrine that a baby says: "I have a mouth, mamma has a mouth: therefore I'm the same species as mamma. I have a nose, papa has a nose: therefore papa is the same genus as me." But whether or not this ingenious idea really does or does not represent the actual process by which we originally obtain an acquaintance with the existence of minds analogous to our own, it gives unquestionably the process by which we obtain our notion of that part of those minds which they never exhibit consciously to others, and which only becomes predominant in secrecy and solitude and to themselves. Now, that Shakespeare has this insight into the musing life of man, as well as into his social life, is easy to prove; take, for instance, the following passages:—

> "This battle fares like to the morning's war,
> When dying clouds contend with growing light;
> What time the shepherd, blowing of his nails,
> Can neither call it perfect day nor night.
> Now sways it this way, like a mighty sea,
> Forc'd by the tide to combat with the wind;
> Now sways it that way, like the self-same sea
> Forc'd to retire by fury of the wind:
> Sometime, the flood prevails; and then, the wind:
> Now, one the better; then, another best;

Both tugging to be victors, breast to breast,
Yet neither conqueror, nor conquered;
So is the equal poise of this fell war.
Here on this molehill will I sit me down.
To whom God will, there be the victory!
For Margaret my queen, and Clifford too,
Have chid me from the battle; swearing both
They prosper best of all when I am thence.
Would I were dead! if God's good will were so;
For what is in this world but grief and woe?
Oh God! methinks it were a happy life,
To be no better than a homely swain:
To sit upon a hill, as I do now,
To carve out dials quaintly, point by point,
Thereby to see the minutes how they run:
How many make the hour full complete,
How many hours bring about the day,
How many days will finish up the year,
How many years a mortal man may live.
When this is known, then to divide the time:
So many hours must I tend my flock;
So many hours must I take my rest;
So many hours must I contemplate;
So many hours must I sport myself;
So many days my ewes have been with young;
So many weeks ere the poor fools will yean;
So many years ere I shall shear the fleece;
So minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, and years,
Pass'd over to the end they were created,
Would bring white hairs unto a quiet grave.
Ah, what a life were this! how sweet! how lovely!
Gives not the hawthorn bush a sweeter shade
To shepherds, looking on their silly sheep
Than doth a rich embroider'd canopy
To kings, that fear their subjects' treachery?
O yes, it doth; a thousand-fold it doth.
And to conclude,—the shepherd's homely curds,
His cold thin drink out of his leather bottle,
His wonted sleep under a fresh tree's shade,
All which secure and sweetly he enjoys,

If far beyond a prince's delicates,
His viands sparkling in a golden cup,
His body couchèd in a curious bed,
When care, mistrust, and treason wait on him."[1]

"A fool, a fool!—I met a fool i' the forest,
A motley fool!—a miserable world;—
As I do live by food, I met a fool;
Who laid him down and basked him in the sun,
And railed on lady Fortune in good terms,
In good set terms,—and yet a motley fool.
'Good-morrow, fool,' quoth I: 'No, sir,' quoth he,
'Call me not fool, till heaven hath sent me fortune:'
And then he drew a dial from his poke,
And looking on it with lack-lustre eye,
Says, very wisely, 'It is ten o'clock:
Thus may we see,' quoth he, 'how the world wags;
'Tis but an hour ago since it was nine;
And after an hour more, 'twill be eleven;
And so, from hour to hour, we ripe and ripe,
And then, from hour to hour, we rot and rot,
And thereby hangs a tale.' When I did hear
The motley fool thus moral on the time,
My lungs began to crow like chanticleer,
That fools should be so deep-contemplative;
And I did laugh, sans intermission,
An hour by his dial."[2]

No slight versatility of mind and pliancy of fancy could pass at will from scenes such as these to the ward of Eastcheap and the society which heard the chimes at midnight. One of the reasons of the rarity of great imaginative works is that in very few cases is this capacity for musing solitude combined with that of observing mankind. A certain constitutional though latent melancholy is essential to such a nature. This is the exceptional characteristic in Shakespeare. All through his works you feel you are reading the popular

[1] "3 King Henry VI.," ii. 5.
[2] "As You Like It," ii. 7.

author, the successful man; but through them all there is a certain tinge of musing sadness pervading, and, as it were, softening their gaiety. Not a trace can be found of "eating cares" or narrow and mind-contracting toil, but everywhere there is, in addition to shrewd sagacity and buoyant wisdom, a refining element of chastening sensibility, which prevents sagacity from being rough, and shrewdness from becoming cold. He had an eye for either sort of life:—

> "Why, let the stricken deer go weep,
> The hart ungallèd play;
> For some must watch, and some must sleep,
> Thus runs the world away."[1]

In another point also Shakespeare, as he was, must be carefully contrasted with the estimate that would be formed of him from such delineations as that of Falstaff, and that was doubtless frequently made by casual, though only by casual, frequenters of the Mermaid. It has been said that the mind of Shakespeare contained within it the mind of Scott; it remains to be observed that it contained also the mind of Keats. For, beside the delineation of human life, and beside also the delineation of Nature, there remains also for the poet a third subject—the delineation of *fancies*. Of course these, be they what they may, are like to, and were originally borrowed from, either man or Nature—from one or from both together. We know but two things in the simple way of direct experience, and whatever else we know must be in some mode or manner compacted out of them. Yet "books are a substantial world, both pure and good," and so are fancies too. In all countries, men have devised to themselves a whole series of half-divine creations—mythologies Greek and Roman, fairies, angels, beings who may be, for aught we know, but with whom, in the meantime, we can attain to no conversation. The most known of these

[1] "Hamlet," iii. 2.

mythologies are the Greek, and what is, we suppose, the second epoch of the Gothic, the fairies; and it so happens that Shakespeare has dealt with them both, and in a remarkable manner. We are not, indeed, of those critics who profess simple and unqualified admiration for the poem of "Venus and Adonis". It seems intrinsically, as we know it from external testimony to have been, a juvenile production, written when Shakespeare's nature might be well expected to be crude and unripened. Power is shown, and power of a remarkable kind; but it is not displayed in a manner that will please or does please the mass of men. In spite of the name of its author, the poem has never been popular—and surely this is sufficient. Nevertheless, it is remarkable as a literary exercise, and as a treatment of a singular, though unpleasant subject. The fanciful class of poems differ from others in being laid, so far as their scene goes, in a perfectly unseen world. The type of such productions is Keats's "Endymion". We mean that it is the type, not as giving the abstract perfection of this sort of art, but because it shows and embodies both its excellences and defects in a very marked and prominent manner. In that poem there are no passions and no actions, there is no art and no life; but there is beauty, and that is meant to be enough, and to a reader of one and twenty it is enough and more. What are exploits or speeches? what is Cæsar or Coriolanus? what is a tragedy like "Lear," or a real view of human life in any kind whatever, to people who do not know and do not care what human life is? In early youth it is, perhaps, not true that the passions, taken generally, are particularly violent, or that the imagination is in any remarkable degree powerful; but it is certain that the fancy (which though it be, in the last resort, but a weak stroke of that same faculty, which, when it strikes hard, we call imagination, may yet for this purpose be looked on as distinct) is particularly wakeful, and

that the gentler species of passions are more absurd than they are afterwards. And the literature of this period of human life runs naturally away from the real world; away from the less ideal portion of it, from stocks and stones, and aunts and uncles, and rests on mere half-embodied sentiments, which in the hands of great poets assume a kind of semi-personality, and are, to the distinction between things and persons, "as moonlight unto sunlight, and as water unto wine".[1] The Sonnets of Shakespeare belong exactly to the same school of poetry. They are not the sort of verses to take any particular hold upon the mind permanently and for ever, but at a certain period they take too much. For a young man to read in the spring of the year among green fields and in gentle air, they are the ideal. As First of April poetry they are perfect.

The "Midsummer Night's Dream" is of another order. If the question were to be decided by "Venus and Adonis," in spite of the unmeasured panegyrics of many writers, we should be obliged in equity to hold, that as a poet of mere fancy Shakespeare was much inferior to the late Mr. Keats and even to meaner men. Moreover, we should have been prepared with some refined reasonings to show that it was unlikely that a poet with so much hold on reality, in life and Nature, both in solitude and in society, should have also a similar command over *un*reality: should possess a command not only of flesh and blood, but of the imaginary entities which the self-inworking fancy brings forth—impalpable conceptions of mere mind: *quædam simulacra miris pallentia modis*,[2] thin ideas, which come we know not whence, and are given us we know not why. But, unfortunately for this ingenious, if not profound suggestion, Shakespeare, in fact, possessed the very faculty which it tends to prove that he

[1] Tennyson: "Locksley Hall".

[2] Lucretius, i. 24.

would not possess. He could paint Poins and Falstaff, but he excelled also in fairy legends. He had such

> " Seething brains;
> Such shaping fantasies as apprehend
> More than cool reason ever comprehends ". [1]

As, for example, the idea of Puck, or Queen Mab, of Ariel, or such a passage as the following:—

> " *Puck.* How now, spirit! whither wander you?
> *Fai.* Over hill, over dale,
> Thorough bush, thorough briar,
> Over park, over pale,
> Thorough flood, thorough fire,
> I do wander everywhere,
> Swifter than the moones sphere;
> And I serve the fairy queen,
> To dew her orbs upon the green:
> The cowslips tall her pensioners be
> In their gold coats spots you see;
> Those be rubies, fairy favours,
> In those freckles live their savours:
> I must go seek some dew-drops here,
> And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear.
> Farewell, thou lob of spirits, I'll be gone;
> Our queen and all our elves come here anon.
> *Puck.* The king doth keep his revels here to-night;
> Take heed the queen come not within his sight.
> For Oberon is passing fell and wrath,
> Because that she, as her attendant, hath
> A lovely boy, stolen from an Indian king;
> She never had so sweet a changeling:
> And jealous Oberon would have the child
> Knight of his train, to trace the forests wild:
> But she, perforce, withholds the lovèd boy,
> Crowns him with flowers, and makes him all her joy
> And now they never meet in grove, or green,
> By fountain clear, or spangled star-light sheen

[1] " Midsummer Night's Dream," v. 1.

But they do square; that all their elves, for fear,
Creep into acorn-cups, and hide them there.
Fai. Either I mistake your shape and making quite,
Or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite
Call'd Robin Good-fellow: are you not he
That fright the maidens of the villagery;
Skim milk; and sometimes labour in the quern,
And bootless make the breathless housewife churn;
And sometimes make the drink to bear no barm;
Mislead night-wanderers, laughing at their harm?
Those that Hobgoblin call you, and sweet Puck,
You do their work, and they shall have good luck:
Are not you he?
Puck. Thou speak'st aright;
I am that merry wanderer of the night.
I jest to Oberon, and make him smile,
When I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile,
Neighing in likeness of a filly foal:
And sometime lurk I in a gossip's bowl,
In very likeness of a roasted crab;
And, when she drinks, against her lips I bob,
And on her wither'd dew-lap pour the ale.
The wisest aunt, telling the saddest tale,
Sometime for three-foot stool mistaketh me;
Then slip I from beneath, down topples she,
And *tailor* cries, and falls into a cough;
And then the whole quire hold their hips, and loffe;
And waxen in their mirth, and neeze and swear
A merrier hour was never wasted there.—
But room, Fairy, here comes Oberon.
Fai. And here my mistress:—Would that he were gone!"[1]

Probably he believed in these things. Why not? Everybody else believed in them then. They suit our climate. As the Greek mythology suits the keen Attic sky, the fairies, indistinct and half-defined, suit a land of wild mists and gentle airs. They confuse the "maidens of the villagery"; they are the paganism of the South of England.

[1] "Midsummer Night's Dream," ii. 1.

Can it be made out what were Shakespeare's political views? We think it certainly can, and that without difficulty. From the English historical plays, it distinctly appears that he accepted, like everybody then, the Constitution of his country. His lot was not cast in an age of political controversy, nor of reform. What was, was from of old. The Wars of the Roses had made it very evident how much room there was for the evils incident to an hereditary monarchy, for instance, those of a controverted succession, and the evils incident to an aristocracy, as want of public spirit and audacious selfishness, to arise and continue within the realm of England. Yet they had not repelled, and had barely disconcerted, our conservative ancestors. They had not become Jacobins; they did not concur—and history, except in Shakespeare, hardly does justice to them—in Jack Cade's notion that the laws should come out of his mouth, or that the commonwealth was to be reformed by interlocutors in this scene.

"*Geo.* I tell thee, Jack Cade the clothier means to dress the Commonwealth, and turn it, and set a new nap on it.

John. So he had need, for 'tis threadbare. Well, I say it was never a merry world in England since gentlemen came up.

Geo. O miserable age! Virtue is not regarded in handycraftsmen.

John. The nobility think scorn to go in leather aprons.

Geo. Nay more: the king's council are no good workmen.

John. True; and yet it is said, Labour in thy vocation; which is as much as to say, as let the magistrates be labouring men, and therefore should we be magistrates.

Geo. Thou hast hit it, for there is no better sign of a brave mind than a hard hand.

John. I see them! I see them!"[1]

The English people did see them, and know them, and therefore have rejected them. An audience which, *bonâ fide*, entered into the merit of this scene, would never believe in

[1] "2 King Henry VI.," iv. 2.

everybody's suffrage. They would know that there is such a thing as nonsense, and when a man has once attained to that deep conception, you may be sure of him ever after. And though it would be absurd to say that Shakespeare originated this idea, or that the disbelief in simple democracy is owing to his teaching or suggestions, yet it may, nevertheless, be truly said, that he shared in the peculiar knowledge of men —and also possessed the peculiar constitution of mind— which engender this effect. The author of "Coriolanus" never believed in a mob, and did something towards preventing anybody else from doing so. But this political idea was not exactly the strongest in Shakespeare's mind. We think he had two other stronger, or as strong. First, the feeling of loyalty to the ancient polity of this country — not because it was good, but because it existed. In his time, people no more thought of the origin of the monarchy than they did of the origin of the Mendip Hills. The one had always been there, and so had the other. God (such was the common notion) had made both, and one as much as the other. Everywhere, in that age, the common modes of political speech assumed the existence of certain utterly national institutions, and would have been worthless and nonsensical except on that assumption. This national habit appears as it ought to appear in our national dramatist. A great divine tells us that the Thirty-nine Articles are "forms of thought"; inevitable conditions of the religious understanding: in politics, "kings, lords, and commons" are, no doubt, "forms of thought," to the great majority of Englishmen; in these they live, and beyond these they never move. You can't reason on the removal (such is the notion) of the English Channel, nor St. George's Channel, nor can you of the English Constitution, in like manner. It is to most of us, and to the happiest of us, a thing immutable, and such, no doubt, it was to Shakespeare, which, if any

one would have proved, let him refer at random to any page of the historical English plays.

The second peculiar tenet which we ascribe to his political creed, is a disbelief in the middle classes. We fear he had no opinion of traders. In this age, we know, it is held that the keeping of a shop is equivalent to a political education. Occasionally, in country villages, where the trader sells everything, he is thought to know nothing, and has no vote; but in a town where he is a householder (as, indeed, he is in the country), and sells only one thing—there we assume that he knows everything. And this assumption is, in the opinion of some observers, confirmed by the fact. Sir Walter Scott used to relate, that when, after a trip to London, he returned to Tweedside, he always found the people in that district knew more of politics than the Cabinet. And so it is with the mercantile community in modern times. If you are a Chancellor of the Exchequer, it is possible that you may be acquainted with finance; but if you sell figs it is certain that you will. Now we nowhere find this laid down in Shakespeare. On the contrary, you will generally find that when a "citizen" is mentioned, he generally does or says something absurd. Shakespeare had a clear perception that it is possible to bribe a class as well as an individual, and that personal obscurity is but an insecure guarantee for political disinterestedness.

> "Moreover, he hath left you all his walks,
> His private arbours and new-planted orchards
> On this side Tiber; he hath left them you,
> And to your heirs for ever: common pleasures,
> To walk abroad and recreate yourselves.
> Here was a Cæsar! when comes such another?"[1]

He everywhere speaks in praise of a tempered and ordered and qualified polity, in which the pecuniary classes have a

[1] "Julius Cæsar," iii. 2.

certain influence, but no more, and shows in every page a keen sensibility to the large views and high-souled energies, the gentle refinements and disinterested desires, in which those classes are likely to be especially deficient. He is particularly the poet of personal nobility, though, throughout his writings, there is a sense of freedom, just as Milton is the poet of freedom, though with an underlying reference to personal nobility; indeed, we might well expect our two poets to combine the appreciation of a rude and generous liberty with that of a delicate and refined nobleness, since it is the union of these two elements that characterises our society and their experience.

There are two things—good-tempered sense and ill-tempered sense. In our remarks on the character of Falstaff, we hope we have made it very clear that Shakespeare had the former; we think it nearly as certain that he possessed the latter also. An instance of this might be taken from that contempt for the perspicacity of the *bourgeoisie* which we have just been mentioning. It is within the limits of what may be called malevolent sense, to take extreme and habitual pleasure in remarking the foolish opinions, the narrow notions, and fallacious deductions which seem to cling to the pompous and prosperous man of business. Ask him his opinion of the currency question, and he puts "bills" and "bullion" together in a sentence, and he does not seem to care what he puts between them. But a more proper instance of (what has an odd sound), the malevolence of Shakespeare is to be found in the play of "Measure for Measure". We agree with Hazlitt, that this play seems to be written, perhaps more than any other, *con amore*, and with a relish; and this seems to be the reason why, notwithstanding the unpleasant nature of its plot, and the absence of any very attractive character, it is yet one of the plays which take hold on the mind most easily and most power-

fully. Now the entire character of Angelo, which is the expressive feature of the piece, is nothing but a successful embodiment of the pleasure, the malevolent pleasure, which a warm-blooded and expansive man takes in watching the rare, the dangerous and inanimate excesses of the constrained and cold-blooded. One seems to see Shakespeare, with his bright eyes and his large lips and buoyant face, watching with a pleasant excitement the excesses of his thin-lipped and calculating creation, as though they were the excesses of a real person. It is the complete picture of a natural hypocrite, who does not consciously disguise strong impulses, but whose very passions seem of their own accord to have disguised themselves and retreated into the recesses of the character, yet only to recur even more dangerously when their proper period is expired, when the will is cheated into security by their absence, and the world (and, it may be, the "judicious person" himself) is impressed with a sure reliance in his chilling and remarkable rectitude.

It has, we believe, been doubted whether Shakespeare was a man much conversant with the intimate society of women. Of course no one denies that he possessed a great knowledge of them—a capital acquaintance with their excellences, faults, and foibles; but it has been thought that this was the result rather of imagination than of society, of creative fancy rather than of perceptive experience. Now that Shakespeare possessed, among other singular qualities, a remarkable imaginative knowledge of women, is quite certain, for he was acquainted with the soliloquies of women. A woman we suppose, like a man, must be alone, in order to speak a soliloquy. After the greatest possible intimacy and experience, it must still be imagination, or fancy at least, which tells any man what a woman thinks of herself and to herself. There will still—get as near the limits of confidence or observation as you can—be a space which must be filled

up from other means. Men can only divine the truth—reserve, indeed, is a part of its charm. Seeing, therefore, that Shakespeare had done what necessarily and certainly must be done without experience, we were in some doubt whether he might not have dispensed with it altogether. A grave reviewer cannot know these things. We thought indeed of reasoning that since the delineations of women in Shakespeare were admitted to be first-rate, it should follow, —at least there was a fair presumption,—that no means or aid had been wanting to their production, and that consequently we ought, in the absence of distinct evidence, to assume that personal intimacy as well as solitary imagination had been concerned in their production. And we meant to cite the "questions about Octavia," which Lord Byron, who thought he had the means of knowing, declared to be "women all over".

But all doubt was removed and all conjecture set to rest by the coming in of an ably-dressed friend from the external world, who mentioned that the language of Shakespeare's women was essentially female language; that there were certain points and peculiarities in the English of cultivated English women, which made it a language of itself, which must be heard familiarly in order to be known. And he added, "Except a greater use of words of Latin derivation, as was natural in an age when ladies received a learned education, a few words not now proper, a few conceits that were the fashion of the time, and there is the very same English in the women's speeches in Shakespeare". He quoted—

> "Think not I love him, though I ask for him;
> 'Tis but a peevish boy:—yet he talks well;—
> But what care I for words? yet words do well,
> When he that speaks them pleases those that hear.
> It is a pretty youth:—not very pretty:—

But, sure, he's proud ; and yet his pride becomes him ;
He'll make a proper man : The best thing in him
Is his complexion ; and faster than his tongue
Did make offence, his eye did heal it up.
He is not tall ; yet for his years he's tall :
His leg is but so-so : and yet 'tis well.
There was a pretty redness in his lip ;
A little riper and more lusty red
Than that mix'd in his cheek ; 'twas just the difference
Betwixt the constant red, and mingled damask.
There be some women, Silvius, had they mark'd him
In parcels as I did, would have gone near
To fall in love with him : but, for my part,
I love him not, nor hate him not ; and yet
I have more cause to hate him than to love him :
For what had he to do to chide at me ?
He said, my eyes were black, and my hair black,
And, now I am remember'd, scorn'd at me :
I marvel, why I answer'd not again :
But that's all one ; " [1]

and the passage of Perdita's cited before about the daffodils that—

" take
The winds of March with beauty ; violets dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
Or Cytherea's breath ; "

and said that these were conclusive. But we have not, ourselves, heard young ladies converse in that manner.

Perhaps it is in his power of delineating women, that Shakespeare contrasts most strikingly with the greatest master of the art of dialogue in antiquity—we mean Plato. It will, no doubt, be said that the delineation of women did not fall within Plato's plan ; that men's life was in that age so separate and predominant that it could be delineated by itself and apart ; and no doubt these remarks are very true. But

[1] " As You Like It," iii. 5.

what led Plato to form that plan? What led him to select that peculiar argumentative aspect of life, in which the masculine element is in so high a degree superior? We believe that he did it because he felt that he could paint that kind of scene much better than he could paint any other. If a person will consider the sort of conversation that was held in the cool summer morning, when Socrates was knocked up early to talk definitions and philosophy with Protagoras, he will feel, not only that women would fancy such dialogues to be certainly stupid, and very possibly to be without meaning, but also that the side of character which is there presented is one from which not only the feminine but even the epicene element is nearly, if not perfectly, excluded. It is the intellect surveying and delineating intellectual characteristics. We have a dialogue of thinking faculties; the character of every man is delineated by showing us, not his mode of action or feeling, but his mode of thinking, alone and by itself. The pure mind, purged of all passion and affection, strives to view and describe others in like manner; and the singularity is, that the likenesses so taken are so good,—that the accurate copying of the merely intellectual effects and indications of character gives so true and so firm an impression of the whole character,—that a daguerreotype of the mind should almost seem to be a delineation of the life. But though in the hand of a consummate artist, such a way of representation may in some sense succeed in the case of men, it would certainly seem sure to fail in the case of women. The mere intellect of a woman is a mere nothing. It originates nothing, it transmits nothing, it retains nothing; it has little life of its own, and therefore it can hardly be expected to attain any vigour. Of the lofty Platonic world of the ideas, which the soul in the old doctrine was to arrive at by pure and continuous reasoning, women were never expected to know anything. Plato (though Mr. Grote denies that he was a

practical man) was much too practical for that; he reserved his teaching for people whose belief was regulated and induced in some measure by abstract investigations; who had an interest in the pure and (as it were) geometrical truth itself; who had an intellectual character (apart from and accessory to their other character) capable of being viewed as a large and substantial existence, Shakespeare's being, like a woman's, worked as a whole. He was capable of intellectual abstractedness, but commonly he was touched with the sense of earth. One thinks of him as firmly set on our coarse world of common clay, but from it he could paint the moving essence of thoughtful feeling—which is the best refinement of the best women. Imogen or Juliet would have thought little of the conversation of Gorgias.

On few subjects has more nonsense been written than on the learning of Shakespeare. In former times, the established tenet was, that he was acquainted with the entire range of the Greek and Latin classics, and familiarly resorted to Sophocles and Æschylus as guides and models. This creed reposed not so much on any painful or elaborate criticism of Shakespeare's plays, as on one of the *a priori* assumptions permitted to the indolence of the wise old world. It was then considered clear, by all critics, that no one could write good English who could not also write bad Latin. Questioning scepticism has rejected this axiom, and refuted with contemptuous facility the slight attempt which had been made to verify this case of it from the evidence of the plays themselves. But the new school, not content with showing that Shakespeare was no formed or elaborate scholar, propounded the idea that he was quite ignorant, just as Mr. Croker "demonstrates" that Napoleon Bonaparte could scarcely write or read. The answer is, that Shakespeare wrote his plays, and that those plays show not only a very powerful, but also a very cultivated mind. A hard student Shakespeare

was not, yet he was a happy and pleased reader of interesting books. He was a natural reader; when a book was dull he put it down, when it looked fascinating he took it up, and the consequence is, that he remembered and mastered what he read. Lively books, read with lively interest, leave strong and living recollections; the instructors, no doubt, say that they ought not to do so, and inculcate the necessity of dry reading. Yet the good sense of a busy public has practically discovered that what is read easily is recollected easily, and what is read with difficulty is remembered with more. It is certain that Shakespeare read the novels of his time, for he has founded on them the stories of his plays; he read Plutarch, for his words still live in the dialogue of the "proud Roman" plays; and it is remarkable that Montaigne is the only philosopher that Shakespeare can be proved to have read, because he deals more than any other philosopher with the first impressions of things which exist. On the other hand, it may be doubted if Shakespeare would have perused his commentators. Certainly, he would have never read a page of this review, and we go so far as to doubt whether he would have been pleased with the admirable discourses of M. Guizot, which we ourselves, though ardent admirers of his style and ideas, still find it a little difficult to *read;*—and what would he have thought of the following speculations of an anonymous individual, whose notes have been recently published in a fine octavo by Mr. Collier, and, according to the periodical essayists, "contribute valuable suggestions to the illustration of the immortal bard"?

"The Two Gentlemen of Verona

"Act I. Scene I.

"P. 92. The reading of the subsequent line has hitherto been
'Tis true; for you are over boots in love';
but the manuscript corrector of the Folio, 1632, has changed it to
'Tis true; *but* you are over boots in love,'

which seems more consistent with the course of the dialogue; for Proteus, remarking that Leander had been 'more than over shoes in love,' with Hero, Valentine answers, that Proteus was even more deeply in love than Leander. Proteus observes of the fable of Hero and Leander—

> 'That's a deep story of a deeper love,
> *For* he was more than over shoes in love'.

Valentine retorts—

> ''Tis true; *but* you are over boots in love'.

For instead of *but* was perhaps caught by the compositor from the preceding line."

It is difficult to fancy Shakespeare perusing a volume of such annotations, though we allow that we admire them ourselves. As to the controversy on his school learning, we have only to say, that though the alleged imitations of the Greek tragedians are mere nonsense, yet there is clear evidence that Shakespeare received the ordinary grammar-school education of his time, and that he had derived from the pain and suffering of several years, not exactly an acquaintance with Greek or Latin, but, like Eton boys, a firm conviction that there are such languages.

Another controversy has been raised as to whether Shakespeare was religious. In the old editions it is commonly enough laid down that, when writing his plays, he had no desire to fill the Globe Theatre, but that his intentions were of the following description. "In this play," "Cymbeline," "Shakespeare has strongly depicted the frailties of our nature, and the effect of vicious passions on the human mind. In the fate of the Queen we behold the adept in perfidy justly sacrificed by the arts she had, with unnatural ambition, prepared for others; and in reviewing her death and that of Cloten, we may easily call to mind the words of Scripture," etc. And of "King Lear" it is observed with great confidence, that Shakespeare, "*no doubt*, intended to mark particularly the afflicting character of children's

ingratitude to their parents, and the conduct of Goneril and Regan to each other; *especially* in the former's poisoning the latter, and laying hands on *herself*, we are taught that those who want gratitude towards their parents (who gave them their being, fed them, nurtured them to *man's* estate) will not scruple to commit more barbarous crimes, and easily to forget that, by destroying their body, they destroy their soul also". And Dr. Ulrici, a very learned and illegible writer, has discovered that in every one of his plays Shakespeare had in view the inculcation of the peculiar sentiments and doctrines of the Christian religion, and considers the "Midsummer Night's Dream" to be a specimen of the lay or amateur sermon. This is what Dr. Ulrici thinks of Shakespeare; but what would Shakespeare have thought of Dr. Ulrici? We believe that "*Via*, goodman Dull," is nearly the remark which the learned professor would have received from the poet to whom his very careful treatise is devoted. And yet, without prying into the Teutonic mysteries, a gentleman of missionary aptitudes might be tempted to remark that in many points Shakespeare is qualified to administer a rebuke to people of the prevalent religion. Meeting a certain religionist is like striking the corner of a wall. He is possessed of a firm and rigid persuasion that you must leave off this and that, stop, cry, be anxious, be advised, and, above all things, refrain from doing what you like, for nothing is so bad for any one as that. And in quite another quarter of the religious hemisphere, we occasionally encounter gentlemen who have most likely studied at the feet of Dr. Ulrici, or at least of an equivalent Gamaliel, and who, when we, or such as we, speaking the language of mortality, remark of a pleasing friend: "Nice fellow, so and so! Good fellow as ever lived!" reply sternly, upon an unsuspecting reviewer, with —"Sir, is he an *earnest* man?" To which, in some cases,

we are unable to return a sufficient answer. Yet Shakespeare, differing, in that respect at least, from the disciples of Carlyle, had, we suspect, an objection to grim people, and we fear would have liked the society of Mercutio better than that of a dreary divine, and preferred Ophelia or "that Juliet" to a female philanthropist of sinewy aspect. And, seriously, if this world is not all evil, he who has understood and painted it best must probably have some good. If the underlying and almighty essence of this world be good, then it is likely that the writer who most deeply approached to that essence will be himself good. There is a religion of week-days as well as of Sundays, of "cakes and ale"[1] as well as of pews and altar cloths. This England lay before Shakespeare as it lies before us all, with its green fields, and its long hedgerows, and its many trees, and its great towns, and its endless hamlets, and its motley society, and its long history, and its bold exploits, and its gathering power, and he saw that they were good. To him, perhaps, more than to any one else, has it been given to see that they were a great unity, a great religious object; that if you could only descend to the inner life, to the deep things, to the secret principles of its noble vigour, to the essence of character, to what we know of Hamlet and seem to fancy of Ophelia, we might, so far as we are capable of so doing, understand the nature which God has made. Let us, then, think of him not as a teacher of dry dogmas, or a sayer of hard sayings, but as—

> "A priest to us all,
> Of the wonder and bloom of the world"—[2]

a teacher of the hearts of men and women; one from whom may be learned something of that inmost principle that ever modulates—

[1] "Twelfth Night," iii. 2.
[2] Matthew Arnold: "The Youth of Nature".

> " With murmurs of the air,
> And motions of the forests and the sea,
> And voice of living beings, and woven hymns,
> Of night and day and the deep heart of man ". [1]

We must pause, lest our readers reject us, as the Bishop of Durham the poor curate, because he was " mystical and confused ".

Yet it must be allowed that Shakespeare was worldly, and the proof of it is, that he succeeded in the world. Possibly this is the point on which we are most richly indebted to tradition. We see generally indeed in Shakespeare's works the popular author, the successful dramatist; there is a life and play in his writings rarely to be found, except in those who have had habitual good luck, and who, by the tact of experience, feel the minds of their readers at every word, as a good rider feels the mouth of his horse. But it would have been difficult quite to make out whether the profits so accruing had been profitably invested—whether the genius to create such illusions was accompanied with the care and judgment necessary to put out their proceeds properly in actual life. We could only have said that there was a general impression of entire calmness and equability in his principal works, rarely to be found where there is much pain, which usually makes gaps in the work and dislocates the balance of the mind. But happily here, and here almost alone, we are on sure historical ground. The reverential nature of Englishmen has carefully preserved what they thought the great excellence of their poet—that he made a fortune. [2] It is certain that Shakespeare was proprietor of

[1] Shelley : " Alastor ".

[2] The only antiquarian thing which can be fairly called an anecdote of Shakespeare is, that Mrs. Alleyne, a shrewd woman in those times, and married to Mr. Alleyne, the founder of Dulwich Hospital, was one day, in the absence of her husband, applied to on some matter by a player who gave a reference to Mr. Hemmings (the " notorious " Mr. Hemmings, the

the Globe Theatre—that he made money there, and invested the same in land at Stratford-on-Avon, and probably no circumstance in his life ever gave him so much pleasure. It was a great thing that he, the son of the wool-comber, the poacher, the good-for-nothing, the vagabond (for so we fear the phrase went in Shakespeare's youth), should return upon the old scene a substantial man, a person of capital, a free-holder, a gentleman to be respected, and over whom even a burgess could not affect the least superiority. The great pleasure in life is doing what people say you cannot do. Why did Mr. Disraeli take the duties of the Exchequer with so much relish? Because people said he was a novelist, an *ad captandum* man, and—*monstrum horrendum!*—a Jew, that could not add up. No doubt it pleased his inmost soul to do the work of the red-tape people better than those who could do nothing else. And so with Shakespeare: it pleased him to be respected by those whom he had respected with boyish reverence, but who had rejected the imaginative man—on their own ground and in their own subject, by the only title which they would regard—in a word, as a moneyed man. We seem to see him eyeing the burgesses with good-humoured fellowship and genial (though suppressed and half-unconscious) contempt, drawing out their old stories, and acquiescing in their foolish notions, with everything in his head and easy sayings upon his tongue,—a full mind and a deep dark eye, that played upon an easy scene—now in fanciful solitude, now in cheerful society; now occupied with deep thoughts, now, and equally so, with trivial recreations, forgetting the dramatist in the man of substance, and the poet in the happy companion; beloved and even respected, with a hope for every one and a smile for all.

commentators say) and to Mr. Shakespeare of the Globe, and that the latter, when referred to, said: "Yes, certainly, he knew him, and he was a rascal and good-for-nothing". The proper speech of a substantial man, such as it is worth while to give a reference to.

WILLIAM COWPER.[1]

(1855.)

For the English, after all, the best literature is the English. We understand the language; the manners are familiar to us; the scene at home; the associations our own. Of course, a man who has not read Homer is like a man who has not seen the ocean. There is a great object of which he has no idea. But we cannot be always seeing the ocean. Its face is always large; its smile is bright; the ever-sounding shore sounds on. Yet we have no property in them. We stop and gaze; we pause and draw our breath; we look and wonder at the grandeur of the other world; but we live on shore. We fancy associations of unknown things and distant climes, of strange men and strange manners. But we are ourselves. Foreigners do not behave as we should, nor do the Greeks. What a strength of imagination, what a long practice, what a facility in the details of fancy is required to picture their past and unknown world! They are deceased. They are said to be immortal, because they have written a good epitaph; but they are gone. Their life and their manners have passed away. We read with interest in the catalogue of the ships—

[1] *Poetical Works of William Cowper.* Edited by Robert Bell. J. W. Parker and Son.

The Life of William Cowper, with Selections from his Correspondence. Being volume i. of the Library of Christian Biography, superintended by the Rev. Robert Bickersteth. Seeley, Jackson and Co.

> "The men of Argos and Tyrintha next.
> And of Hermione, that stands retired
> With Asine, within her spacious bay;
> Of Epidaurus, crowned with purple vines,
> And of Træzena, with the Achaian youth
> Of sea-begirt Ægina, and with thine
> Maseta, and the dwellers on thy coast,
> Waveworn Eïonæ; . . .
> And from Caristus and from Styra came
> Their warlike multitudes, in front of whom
> Elphenor marched, Calchodon's mighty son.
> With foreheads shorn and wavy locks behind,
> They followed, and alike were eager all
> To split the hauberk with the shortened spear." [1]

But they are dead. "'So am not I,' said the foolish fat scullion."[2] We are the English of the present day. We have cows and calves, corn and cotton; we hate the Russians; we know where the Crimea is; we believe in Manchester the great. A large expanse is around us; a fertile land of corn and orchards, and pleasant hedgerows, and rising trees, and noble prospects, and large black woods, and old church towers. The din of great cities comes mellowed from afar. The green fields, the half-hidden hamlets, the gentle leaves, soothe us with "a sweet inland murmur".[3] We have before us a vast seat of interest, and toil, and beauty, and power, and this our own. Here is our home. The use of foreign literature is like the use of foreign travel. It imprints in early and susceptible years a deep impression of great, and strange, and noble objects; but we cannot live with these. They do not resemble our familiar life; they do not bind themselves to our intimate affection; they are picturesque and striking, like strangers and wayfarers, but they are not of our home, or

[1] *Iliad*, book ii., Cowper's translation, revised by Southey.
[2] *Tristram Shandy*, book iv., chap. vii
[3] Wordsworth: "Tintern Abbey".

homely; they cannot speak to our "business and bosoms";[1] they cannot touch the hearth of the soul. It would be better to have no outlandish literature in the mind than to have it the principal thing. We should be like accomplished vagabonds without a country, like men with a hundred acquaintances and no friends. We need an intellectual possession analogous to our own life; which reflects, embodies, improves it; on which we can repose; which will recur to us in the placid moments—which will be a latent principle even in the acute crises of life. Let us be thankful if our researches in foreign literature enable us, as rightly used they will enable us, better to comprehend our own. Let us venerate what is old, and marvel at what is far. Let us read our own books. Let us understand ourselves.

With these principles, if such they may be called, in our minds, we gladly devote these early pages of our journal[2] to the new edition of Cowper with which Mr. Bell has favoured us. There is no writer more exclusively English. There is no one—or hardly one, perhaps—whose excellences are more natural to our soil, and seem so little able to bear transplantation. We do not remember to have seen his name in any continental book. Professed histories of English literature, we dare say, name him; but we cannot recall any such familiar and cursory mention as would evince a real knowledge and hearty appreciation of his writings.

The edition itself is a good one. The life of Cowper, which is prefixed to it, though not striking, is sensible. The notes are clear, explanatory, and, so far as we know, accurate. The special introductions to each of the poems are short and judicious, and bring to the mind at the proper moment the passages in Cowper's letters most clearly relating to the

[1] Bacon: Dedication to Essay.

[2] This was the second article in the first number of the *National Review*.

work in hand. The typography is not very elegant, but it is plain and business-like. There is no affectation of cheap ornament.

The little book which stands second on our list belongs to a class of narratives written for a peculiar public, inculcating peculiar doctrines, and adapted, at least in part, to a peculiar taste. We dissent from many of these tenets, and believe that they derive no support, but rather the contrary, from the life of Cowper. In previous publications, written for the same persons, these opinions have been applied to that melancholy story in a manner which it requires strong writing to describe. In this little volume they are more rarely expressed, and when they are it is with diffidence, tact, and judgment.

Only a most pedantic critic would attempt to separate the criticism on Cowper's works from a narrative of his life. Indeed, such an attempt would be scarcely intelligible. Cowper's poems are almost as much connected with his personal circumstances as his letters, and his letters are as purely autobiographical as those of any man can be. If all information concerning him had perished save what his poems contain, the attention of critics would be diverted from the examination of their interior characteristics to a conjectural dissertation on the personal fortunes of the author. The Germans would have much to say. It would be debated in Tübingen who were the Three Hares, why "The Sofa" was written, why John Gilpin was not called William. Halle would show with great clearness that there was no reason why he *should* be called William; that it appeared by the bills of mortality that several other persons born about the same period had also been called John; and the ablest of all the professors would finish the subject with a monograph showing that there was a special fitness in the name John, and that any one with the æsthetic sense who

(like the professor) had devoted many years exclusively to the perusal of the poem, would be certain that any other name would be quite "paralogistic, and in every manner impossible and inappropriate". It would take a German to write upon the Hares.

William Cowper, the poet, was born on 26th November, 1731, at his father's parsonage, at Berkhampstead. Of his father, who was chaplain to the king, we know nothing of importance. Of his mother, who had been named Donne, and was a Norfolk lady, he has often made mention, and it appears that he regarded the faint recollection which he retained of her—for she died early—with peculiar tenderness. In later life, and when his sun was going down in gloom and sorrow, he recurred eagerly to opportunities of intimacy with her most distant relatives, and wished to keep alive the idea of her in his mind. That idea was not of course very definite; indeed, as described in his poems, it is rather the abstract idea of what a mother should be, than anything else; but he was able to recognise her picture, and there is a suggestion of cakes and sugar-plums, which gives a life and vividness to the rest. Soon after her death he was sent to a school kept by a man named Pitman, at which he always described himself as having suffered exceedingly from the cruelty of one of the boys. He could never see him, or think of him, he has told us, without trembling. And there must have been some solid reason for this terror, since—even in those days, when τύπτω meant "I strike," and "boy" denoted a thing to be beaten—this juvenile inflicter of secret stripes was actually expelled. From Mr. Pitman, Cowper, on account of a weakness in the eyes, which remained with him through life, was transferred to the care of an oculist,—a dreadful fate even for the most cheerful boy, and certainly not likely to cure one with any disposition to melancholy; hardly indeed can the boldest mind, in its toughest hour of

manly fortitude, endure to be domesticated with an operation chair. Thence he went to Westminster, of which he has left us discrepant notices, according to the feeling for the time being uppermost in his mind. From several parts of the "Tirocinium," it would certainly seem that he regarded the whole system of public school teaching not only with speculative disapproval, but with the painful hatred of a painful experience. A thousand genial passages in his private letters, however, really prove the contrary; and in a changing mood of mind, the very poem which was expressly written to "recommend private tuition at home" gives some idea of school happiness.

> "Be it a weakness, it deserves some praise,
> We love the play-place of our early days;
> The scene is touching, and the heart is stone
> That feels not at that sight, and feels at none.
> The wall on which we tried our graving skill,
> The very name we carved subsisting still,
> The bench on which we sat while deep employed,
> Though mangled, hacked, and hewed, not yet destroyed
> The little ones unbuttoned, glowing hot,
> Playing our games, and on the very spot,
> As happy as we once, to kneel and draw
> The chalky ring, and knuckle down at taw;
> To pitch the ball into the grounded hat,
> Or drive it devious with a dextrous pat;
> The pleasing spectacle at once excites
> Such recollections of our own delights,
> That viewing it, we seem almost t' obtain
> Our innocent sweet simple years again.
> This fond attachment to the well-known place,
> Whence first we started into life's long race,
> Maintains its hold with such unfailing sway,
> We feel it e'en in age, and at our latest day."

Probably we pursue an insoluble problem in seeking a suitable education for a morbidly melancholy mind. At first it seems a dreadful thing to place a gentle and sensitive

nature in contact, in familiarity, and even under the rule of coarse and strong buoyant natures. Nor should this be in general attempted. The certain result is present suffering, and the expected good is remote and disputable. Nevertheless, it is no artificial difficulty which we here encounter—none which we can hope by educational contrivances to meet or vanquish. The difficulty is in truth the existence of the world. It is the fact, that by the constitution of society the bold, the vigorous, and the buoyant, rise and rule; and that the weak, the shrinking, and the timid, fall and serve. In after-life, in the actual commerce of men, even too in those quiet and tranquil pursuits in which a still and gentle mind should seem to be under the least disadvantage, in philosophy and speculation, the strong and active, who have confidence in themselves and their ideas, acquire and keep dominion. It is idle to expect that this will not give great pain—that the shrinking and timid, who are often just as ambitious as others, will not repine—that the rough and strong will not often consciously inflict grievous oppression—will not still more often, without knowing it, cause to more tremulous minds a refined suffering which their coarser texture could never experience, which it does not sympathise with, nor comprehend. Sometime in life—it is but a question of a very few years at most—this trial must be undergone. There may be a short time, more or less, of gentle protection and affectionate care, but the leveret grows old—the world waits at the gate—the hounds are ready, and the huntsman too, and there is need of strength, and pluck, and speed. Cowper indeed, himself, as we have remarked, does not, on an attentive examination, seem to have suffered exceedingly. In subsequent years, when a dark cloud had passed over him, he was apt at times to exaggerate isolated days of melancholy and pain, and fancy that the dislike which he entertained for the system of schools, by way of speculative prin-

ciple, was in fact the result of a personal and suffering experience. But, as we shall have (though we shall not, in fact, perhaps use them all) a thousand occasions to observe, he had, side by side with a morbid and melancholy humour, an easy nature, which was easily satisfied with the world as he found it, was pleased with the gaiety of others, and liked the sight of, and sympathy with, the more active enjoyments which he did not care to engage in or to share. Besides, there is every evidence that cricket and marbles (though he sometimes in his narratives suppresses the fact, in condescension to those of his associates who believed them to be the idols of wood and stone which are spoken of in the prophets) really exercised a laudable and healthy supremacy over his mind. The animation of the scene—the gay alertness which Gray looked back on so fondly in long years of soothing and delicate musing, exerted, as the passage which we cited shows, a great influence over a genius superior to Gray's in facility and freedom, though inferior in the "little footsteps"[1] of the finest fancy,—in the rare and carefully hoarded felicities, unequalled save in the immeasurable abundance of the greatest writers. Of course Cowper was unhappy at school, as he was unhappy always; and of course, too, we are speaking of Westminster only. For Dr. Pitman and the oculist there is nothing to say.

In scholarship Cowper seems to have succeeded. He was not, indeed, at all the sort of man to attain to that bold, strong-brained, confident scholarship which Bentley carried to such an extreme, and which, in almost every generation since, some Englishman has been found of hard head and

[1] "There scattered oft, the earliest of the year,
By hands unseen are showers of violets found;
The redbreast loves to build and warble there,
And little footsteps lightly print the ground."—
Verse in Gray's "Elegy," cancelled by him. (Forrest Morgan.)

stiff-clayed memory to keep up and perpetuate. His friend Thurlow was the man for this pursuit, and the man to prolong the just notion that those who attain early proficiency in it are likely men to become Lord Chancellors. Cowper's scholarship was simply the general and delicate *impression* which the early study of the classics invariably leaves on a nice and susceptible mind. In point of information it was strictly of a common nature. It is clear that his real knowledge was mostly confined to the poets, especially the ordinary Latin poets and Homer, and that he never bestowed any regular attention on the historians, or orators, or philosophers of antiquity, either at school or in after years. Nor indeed would such a course of study have in reality been very beneficial to him. The strong, analytic, comprehensive, reason-giving powers which are required in these dry and rational pursuits were utterly foreign to his mind. All that was congenial to him, he acquired in the easy intervals of apparent idleness. The friends whom he made at Westminster, and who continued for many years to be attached to him, preserved the probable tradition that he was a gentle and gradual, rather than a forcible or rigorous learner.

The last hundred years have doubtless seen a vast change in the common education of the common boy. The small and pomivorous animal which we so call is now subjected to a treatment very elaborate and careful,—that contrasts much with the simple alternation of classics and cuffs which was formerly so fashionable. But it may be doubted whether for a peculiar mind such as Cowper's, on the intellectual side at least, the tolerant and corpuscular theory of the last century was not preferable to the intolerant and never-resting moral influence that has succeeded to it. Some minds learn most when they seem to learn least. A certain, placid, unconscious, equable in-taking of knowledge suits them, and alone suits them. To succeed in forcing such men to attain

great learning is simply impossible; for you cannot put the fawn into the "Land Transport". The only resource is to allow them to acquire gently and casually in their own way; and in that way they will often imbibe, as if by the mere force of existence, much pleasant and well-fancied knowledge.

From Westminster Cowper went at once into a solicitor's office. Of the next few years (he was then about eighteen) we do not know much. His attention to legal pursuits was, according to his own account, not very profound; yet it could not have been wholly contemptible, for his evangelical friend, Mr. Newton, who, whatever may be the worth of his religious theories, had certainly a sound, rough judgment on topics terrestrial, used in after years to have no mean opinion of the value of his legal counsel. In truth, though nothing could be more out of Cowper's way than abstract and recondite jurisprudence, an easy and sensible mind like his would find a great deal which was very congenial to it in the well-known and perfectly settled maxims which regulate and rule the daily life of common men. No strain of capacity or stress of speculative intellect is necessary for the apprehension of these. A fair and easy mind, which is placed within their reach, will find it has learnt them, without knowing when or how.

After some years of legal instruction, Cowper chose to be called to the bar, and took chambers in the Temple accordingly. He never, however, even pretended to practise. He passed his time in literary society, in light study, in tranquil negligence. He was intimate with Colman, Lloyd, and other wits of those times. He wrote an essay in the *Connoisseur*, the kind of composition then most fashionable, especially with such literary gentlemen as were most careful not to be confounded with the professed authors. In a word, he did "nothing," as that word is understood among the

vigorous, aspiring, and trenchant part of mankind. Nobody could seem less likely to attain eminence. Every one must have agreed that there was no harm in him, and few could have named any particular good which it was likely that he would achieve. In after days he drew up a memoir of his life, in which he speaks of those years with deep self-reproach. It was not, indeed, the secular indolence of the time which excited his disapproval. The course of life had not made him more desirous of worldly honours, but less; and nothing could be further from his tone of feeling than regret for not having strenuously striven to attain them. He spoke of those years in the Puritan manner, using words which literally express the grossest kind of active Atheism in a vague and vacant way; leaving us to gather from external sources whether they are to be understood in their plain and literal signification, or in that out-of-the-way and technical sense in which they hardly have a meaning. In this case the external evidence is so clear that there is no difficulty. The regrets of Cowper had reference to offences which the healthy and sober consciences of mankind will not consider to deserve them. A vague, literary, omnitolerant idleness was perhaps their worst feature. He was himself obliged to own that he had always been considered "as one religiously inclined, if not actually religious,"[1] and the applicable testimony, as well as the whole form and nature of his character, forbid us to ascribe to him the slightest act of license or grossness. A reverend biographer has called his life at this time, "an unhappy compound of guilt and wretchedness". But unless the estimable gentleman thinks it sinful to be a barrister and wretched to live in the Temple, it is not easy to make out what he would mean. In point of intellectual cultivation, and with a view to preparing himself for writing his subsequent works, it is not possible he should have spent

[1] Autobiography.

his time better. He then acquired that easy, familiar knowledge of terrestrial things—the vague and general information of the superficies of all existence—the acquaintance with life, business, hubbub, and rustling matter-of-fact, which seem odd in the recluse of Olney—and enliven so effectually the cucumbers of the "Task". It has been said that at times every man wishes to be a man of the world, and even the most rigid critic must concede it to be nearly essential to a writer on real life and actual manners. If a man has not seen his brother, how can he describe him? As this world calls happiness and blamelessness, it is not easy to fancy a life more happy—at least with more of the common elements of happiness, or more blameless than those years of Cowper. An easy temper, light fancies,—hardly as yet broken by shades of melancholy brooding;—an enjoying habit, rich humour, literary, but not pedantic companions, a large scene of life and observation, polished acquaintance and attached friends: these were his, and what has a light life more? A rough hero Cowper was not and never became, but he was then, as ever, a quiet and tranquil gentleman. If De Béranger's doctrine were true, "*Le bonheur tient au savoir-vivre*," there were the materials of existence here. What, indeed, would not De Béranger have made of them?

One not unnatural result or accompaniment of such a life was that Cowper fell in love. There were in those days two young ladies, cousins of Cowper, residents in London, to one of whom, the Lady Hesketh of after years, he once wrote:—"My dear Cousin,—I wonder how it happened, that much as I love you, I was never in love with you". No similar providence protected his intimacy with her sister. Theodora Cowper, "one of the cousins with whom he and Thurlow used to giggle and make giggle in Southampton Row,"[1] was a handsome and vigorous damsel. "What!" said her

[1] Southey, quoting a letter of Cowper to Lady Hesketh.

father, "what will you do if you marry William Cowper?" meaning, in the true parental spirit, to intrude mere pecuniary ideas. "Do, sir!" she replied. "Wash all day, and ride out on the great dog all night!" a spirited combination of domestic industry and exterior excitement. It is doubtful, however, whether either of these species of pastime and occupation would have been exactly congenial to Cowper. A gentle and refined indolence must have made him an inferior washerman, and perhaps to accompany the canine excursions of a wife "which clear-starched," would have hardly seemed enough to satisfy his accomplished and placid ambition. At any rate, it certainly does seem that he was not a very vigorous lover. The young lady was, as he himself oddly said:—

> "Through tedious years of doubt and pain,
> Fixed in her choice and faithful . . . *but in vain*".

The poet does indeed partly allude to the parental scruples of Mr. Cowper, her father; but house-rent would not be so high as it is, if fathers had their way. The profits of builders are eminently dependent on the uncontrollable nature of the best affections; and that intelligent class of men have had a table compiled from trustworthy data, in which the chances of parental victory are rated at ·0000000001, and those of the young people themselves at ·9999999999,—in fact, as many nines as you can imagine. "It has been represented to me," says the actuary, "that few young people ever marry without some objection, more or less slight, on the part of their parents; and from a most laborious calculation, from data collected in quarters both within and exterior to the bills of mortality, I am led to believe that the above figures represent the state of the case accurately enough to form a safe guide for the pecuniary investments of the gentlemen," etc., etc. It is not likely that Theodora Cowper

understood decimals, but she had a strong opinion in favour of her cousin, and a great idea, if we rightly read the now obscure annals of old times, that her father's objections might pretty easily have been got over. In fact, we think so even now, without any prejudice of affection, in our cool and mature judgment. Mr. Cowper the aged had nothing to say, except that the parties were cousins—a valuable remark, which has been frequently repeated in similar cases, but which has not been found to prevent a mass of matches both then and since. Probably the old gentleman thought the young gentleman by no means a working man, and objected, believing that a small income can only be made more by unremitting industry,—and the young gentleman, admitting this horrid and abstract fact, and agreeing, though perhaps tacitly, in his uncle's estimate of his personal predilections, did not object to being objected to. The nature of Cowper was not, indeed, passionate. He required beyond almost any man the daily society of amiable and cultivated women. It is clear that he preferred such gentle excitement to the rough and argumentative pleasures of more masculine companionship. His easy and humorous nature loved and learned from female detail. But he had no overwhelming partiality for a particular individual. One refined lady, the first moments of shyness over, was nearly as pleasing as another refined lady. Disappointment sits easy on such a mind. Perhaps, too, he feared the anxious duties, the rather contentious tenderness of matrimonial existence. At any rate, he acquiesced. Theodora never married. Love did not, however, kill her—at least, if it did, it was a long time at the task, as she survived these events more than sixty years. She never, seemingly, forgot the past.

But a dark cloud was at hand. If there be any truly painful fact about the world now tolerably well established by ample experience and ample records, it is that an

intellectual and indolent happiness is wholly denied to the children of men. That most valuable author, Lucretius, who has supplied us and others with an inexhaustible supply of metaphors on this topic, ever dwells on the life of his gods with a sad and melancholy feeling that no such life was possible on a crude and cumbersome earth. In general, the two opposing agencies are marriage and money; either of these breaks the lot of literary and refined inaction at once and for ever. The first of these, as we have seen, Cowper had escaped. His reserved and negligent reveries were still free, at least from the invasion of affection. To this invasion, indeed, there is commonly requisite the acquiescence or connivance of mortality; but all men are born, not free and equal, as the Americans maintain, but, in the Old World at least, basely subjected to the yoke of coin. It is in vain that in this hemisphere we endeavour after impecuniary fancies. In bold and eager youth we go out on our travels. We visit Baalbec, and Paphos, and Tadmor, and Cythera,—ancient shrines and ancient empires, seats of eager love or gentle inspiration. We wander far and long. We have nothing to do with our fellow-men. What are we, indeed, to diggers and counters? We wander far; we dream to wander for ever, but we dream in vain. A surer force than the subtlest fascination of fancy is in operation. The purse-strings tie us to our kind. Our travel-coin runs low, and we must return, away from Tadmor and Baalbec back to our steady, tedious industry and dull work, to "*la vieille Europe* (as Napoleon said) *qui m'ennuie*". It is the same in thought. In vain we seclude ourselves in elegant chambers, in fascinating fancies, in refined reflections. "By this time," says Cowper, "my patrimony being nearly all spent, and there being no appearance that I should ever repair the damage by a fortune of my own getting, I began to be a little apprehensive of approaching want." However little one is fit for it, it is

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necessary to attack some drudgery. The vigorous and sturdy rouse themselves to the work. They find in its regular occupation, clear decisions, and stern perplexities, a bold and rude compensation for the necessary loss or diminution of light fancies and delicate musings,—

> "The sights which youthful poets dream,
> On summer eve by haunted stream".[1]

But it was not so with Cowper. A peculiar and slight nature unfitted him for so rough and harsh a resolution. The lion may eat straw like the ox, and the child put his head on the cockatrice' den; but will even then the light antelope be equal to the heavy plough? Will the gentle gazelle, even in those days, pull the slow waggon of ordinary occupation?

The outward position of Cowper was, indeed, singularly fortunate. Instead of having to meet the long labours of an open profession, or the anxious decisions of a personal business, he had the choice among several lucrative and quiet public offices, in which very ordinary abilities would suffice, and scarcely any degree of incapacity would entail dismissal, or reprimand, or degradation. It seemed at first scarcely possible that even the least strenuous of men should be found unequal to duties so little arduous or exciting. He has himself said—

> "Lucrative offices are seldom lost
> For want of powers proportioned to the post;
> Give e'en a dunce the employment he desires,
> And he soon finds the talents it requires;
> A business with an income at its heels,
> Furnishes always oil for its own wheels".[2]

The place he chose was called the Clerkship of the Journals of the House of Lords, one of the many quiet haunts which

[1] Milton: "L'Allegro". [2] "Retirement.

then slumbered under the imposing shade of parliamentary and aristocratic privilege. Yet the idea of it was more than he could bear.

"In the beginning," he writes, "a strong opposition to my friend's right of nomination began to show itself. A powerful party was formed among the Lords to thwart it, in favour of an old enemy of the family, though one much indebted to its bounty; and it appeared plain that, if we succeeded at last, it would only be by fighting our ground by inches. Every advantage, as I was told, would be sought for, and eagerly seized, to disconcert us. I was bid to expect an examination at the bar of the House, touching my sufficiency for the post I had taken. Being necessarily ignorant of the nature of that business, it became expedient that I should visit the office daily, in order to qualify myself for the strictest scrutiny. All the horror of my fears and perplexities now returned. A thunderbolt would have been as welcome to me as this intelligence. I knew, to demonstration, that upon these terms the clerkship of the journals was no place for me. To require my attendance at the bar of the House, that I might there publicly entitle myself to the office, was, in effect, to exclude me from it. In the meantime, the interest of my friend, the honour of his choice, my own reputation and circumstances, all urged me forward; all pressed me to undertake that which I saw to be impracticable. They whose spirits are formed like mine, to whom *a public exhibition of themselves, on any occasion, is mortal poison*, may have some idea of the horrors of my situation; others can have none.

"My continual misery at length brought on a nervous fever: quiet forsook me by day, and peace by night; a finger raised against me was more than I could stand against. In this posture of mind, I attended regularly at the office; where, instead of a soul upon the rack, the most active spirits were essentially necessary for my purpose. I expected no assistance from anybody there, all the inferior clerks being under the influence of my opponent; and accordingly I received none. The journal books were indeed thrown open to me—a thing which could not be refused; and from which, perhaps, a man in health, and with a head turned to business, might have gained all the information he wanted; but it was not so with me. I read without perception, and was so distressed, that, had every clerk in the office been my friend, it could have availed me little; for I was not in a condition to receive instruction, much less to elicit it out of manuscripts, without direction. Many months went over me thus employed; constant in the use of means, despairing as to the issue."

As the time of trial drew near, his excitement rapidly increased. A short excursion into the country was attended with momentary benefit; but as soon as he returned to town he became immediately unfit for occupation, and as unsettled as ever. He grew first to wish to become mad, next to believe that he should become so, and only to be afraid that the expected delirium might not come on soon enough to prevent his appearance for examination before the Lords,—a fear, the bare existence of which shows how slight a barrier remained between him and the insanity which he fancied that he longed for. He then began to contemplate suicide, and not unnaturally called to mind a curious circumstance.

"I well recollect, too," he writes, "that when I was about eleven years of age, my father desired me to read a vindication of self-murder, and give him my sentiments upon the question: I did so, and argued against it. My father heard my reasons, and was silent, neither approving nor disapproving; from whence I inferred that he sided with the author against me; though all the time, I believe, the true motive for his conduct was, that he wanted, if he could, to think favourably of the state of a departed friend, who had some years before destroyed himself, and whose death had struck him with the deepest affliction. But this solution of the matter never once occurred to me, and the circumstance now weighed mightily with me."

And he made several attempts to execute his purpose, all which are related in a "Narrative," which he drew up after his recovery; and of which the elaborate detail shows a strange and most painful tendency to revive the slightest circumstances of delusions which it would have been most safe and most wholesome never to recall. The curiously careful style, indeed, of the narration, as elegant as that of the most flowing and felicitous letter, reminds one of nothing so much as the studiously beautiful and compact handwriting in which Rousseau used to narrate and describe the most incoherent and indefinite of his personal delusions. On the whole, nevertheless—for a long time, at least—it does not

seem that the life of Cowper was in real danger. The hesitation and indeterminateness of nerve which rendered him liable to these fancies, and unequal to ordinary action, also prevented his carrying out these terrible visitations to their rigorous and fearful consequences. At last, however, there seems to have been possible, if not actual danger.

"Not one hesitating thought now remained, but I fell greedily to the execution of my purpose. My garter was made of a broad piece of scarlet binding, with a sliding buckle, being sewn together at the ends; by the help of the buckle I formed a noose, and fixed it about my neck, straining it so tight that I hardly left a passage for my breath, or for the blood to circulate; the tongue of the buckle held it fast. At each corner of the bed was placed a wreath of carved work, fastened by an iron pin, which passed up through the midst of it: the other part of the garter, which made a loop, I slipped over one of these, and hung by it some seconds, drawing up my feet under me, that they might not touch the floor; but the iron bent, and the carved work slipped off, and the garter with it. I then fastened it to the frame of the tester, winding it round, and tying it in a strong knot. The frame broke short, and let me down again.

"The third effort was more likely to succeed. I set the door open, which reached within a foot of the ceiling; by the help of a chair I could command the top of it, and the loop being large enough to admit a large angle of the door, was easily fixed so as not to slip off again. I pushed away the chair with my feet, and hung at my whole length. While I hung there, I distinctly heard a voice say three times, '*'Tis over!*' Though I am sure of the fact, and was so at the time, yet it did not at all alarm me, or affect my resolution. I hung so long that I lost all sense, all consciousness of existence.

"When I came to myself again, I thought myself in hell; the sound of my own dreadful groans was all that I heard, and a feeling like that produced by a flash of lightning just beginning to seize upon me, passed over my whole body. In a few seconds I found myself fallen on my face to the floor. In about half a minute I recovered my feet: and, reeling and staggering, tumbled into bed again.

"By the blessed providence of God, the garter which had held me till the bitterness of temporal death was past, broke just before eternal death had taken place upon me. The stagnation of the blood under one eye, in a broad crimson spot, and a red circle round my neck, showed

plainly that I had been on the brink of eternity. The latter, indeed, might have been occasioned by the pressure of the garter, but the former was certainly the effect of strangulation; for it was not attended with the sensation of a bruise, as it must have been, had I, in my fall, received one in so tender a part. And I rather think the circle round my neck was owing to the same cause; for the part was not excoriated, not at all in pain.

"Soon after I got into bed, I was surprised to hear a noise in the dining-room, where the laundress was lighting a fire; she had found the door unbolted, notwithstanding my design to fasten it, and must have passed the bed-chamber door while I was hanging on it, and yet never perceived me. She heard me fall, and presently came to ask me if I was well; adding, she feared I had been in a fit.

"I sent her to a friend, to whom I related the whole affair, and dispatched him to my kinsman at the coffee-house. As soon as the latter arrived, I pointed to the broken garter, which lay in the middle of the room, and apprised him also of the attempt I had been making. His words were: 'My dear Mr. Cowper, you terrify me! To be sure you cannot hold the office at this rate,—where is the deputation?' I gave him the key of the drawer where it was deposited; and his business requiring his immediate attendance, he took it away with him; and thus ended all my connection with the Parliament office."

It must have been a strange scene; for, so far as appears, the outward manners of Cowper had undergone no remarkable change. There was always a mild composure about them, which would have deceived any but the most experienced observer; and it is probable that Major Cowper, his "kinsman" and intimate friend, had very little or no suspicion of the conflict which was raging beneath his tranquil and accomplished exterior. What a contrast is the "broad piece of scarlet binding" and the red circle, "showing plainly that I had been on the brink of eternity," to the daily life of the easy gentleman "who contributed some essays to the *St. James's Magazine*, and more than one to the *St. James's Chronicle*," living "soft years" on a smooth superficies of existence, away from the dark realities which are, as it were, the skeleton of our life,—which seem to haunt us like a

death's head throughout the narrative that has been quoted!

It was doubtless the notion of Cowper's friends, that when all idea of an examination before the Lords was removed, by the abandonment of his nomination to the office in question, the excitement which that idea had called forth would very soon pass away. But that notion was an error. A far more complicated state of mind ensued. If we may advance a theory on a most difficult as well as painful topic, we would say that religion is very rarely the proximate or impulsive cause of madness. The real and ultimate cause (as we speak) is of course that unknown something which we variously call pre-disposition, or malady, or defect. But the critical and exciting cause seems generally to be some comparatively trivial external occasion, which falls within the necessary lot and life of the person who becomes mad. The inherent excitability is usually awakened by some petty casual stimulant, which looks positively not worth a thought—certainly a terribly slight agent for the wreck and havoc which it makes. The constitution of the human mind is such, that the great general questions, problems, and difficulties of our state of being are not commonly capable of producing that result. They appear to lie too far in the distance, to require too great a stretch of imagination, to be too apt (for the very weakness of our minds' sake, perhaps) to be thrust out of view by the trivial occurrences of this desultory world,—to be too impersonal, in truth, to cause the exclusive, anxious, aching occupation which is the common prelude and occasion of insanity. Afterwards, on the other hand, when the wound is once struck, when the petty circumstance has been allowed to work its awful consequence, religion very frequently becomes the predominating topic of delusion. It would seem as if, when the mind was once set apart by the natural consequences of the disease, and secluded

from the usual occupations of, and customary contact with, other minds, it searched about through all the universe for causes of trouble and anguish. A certain pain probably exists; and even in insanity, man is so far a rational being that he seeks and craves at least the outside and semblance of a reason for a suffering, which is really and truly without reason. Something must be found to justify its anguish to itself. And naturally the great difficulties inherent in the very position of man in this world, and trying so deeply the faith and firmness of the wariest and wisest minds, are ever ready to present plausible justifications or causeless depression. An anxious melancholy is not without very perplexing sophisms and very painful illustrations, with which a morbid mind can obtain not only a fair logical position, but even apparent argumentative victories, on many points, over the more hardy part of mankind. The acuteness of madness soon uses these in its own wretched and terrible justification. No originality of mind is necessary for so doing. Great and terrible systems of divinity and philosophy lie round about us, which, if true, might drive a wise man mad—which read like professed exculpations of a contemplated insanity.

"To this moment," writes Cowper, immediately after the passage which has been quoted, "I had felt no concern of a spiritual kind." But now a conviction fell upon him that he was eternally lost. "All my worldly sorrows," he says, "seemed as if they had never been; the terrors which succeeded them seemed so great and so much more afflicting. One moment I thought myself expressly excluded by one chapter; next by another." He thought the curse of the barren fig-tree was pronounced with an especial and designed reference to him. All day long these thoughts followed him. He lived nearly alone, and his friends were either unaware of the extreme degree to which his mind was excited, or unalive to the possible alleviation with which new scenes and cheerful

society might have been attended. He fancied the people in the street stared at and despised him—that ballads were made in ridicule of him—that the voice of his conscience was eternally audible. He then bethought him of a Mr. Madan, an evangelical minister, at that time held in much estimation, but who afterwards fell into disrepute by the publication of a work on marriage and its obligations (or rather its *non*-obligations), which Cowper has commented on in a controversial poem. That gentleman visited Cowper at his request, and began to explain to him the gospel.

"He spoke," says Cowper, "of original sin, and the corruption of every man born into the world, whereby every one is a child of wrath. I perceived something like hope dawning in my heart. This doctrine set me more on a level with the rest of mankind, and made my condition appear less desperate.

"Next he insisted on the all-atoning efficacy of the blood of Jesus, and His righteousness, for our justification. While I heard this part of his discourse, and the Scriptures on which he founded it, my heart began to burn within me; my soul was pierced with a sense of my bitter ingratitude to so merciful a Saviour; and those tears, which I thought impossible, burst forth freely. I saw clearly that my case required such a remedy, and had not the least doubt within me but that this was the gospel of salvation.

"Lastly, he urged the necessity of a lively faith in Jesus Christ; not an assent only of the understanding, but a faith of application, an actually laying hold of it, and embracing it as a salvation wrought out for me personally. Here I failed, and deplored my want of such a faith. He told me it was the gift of God, which he trusted He would bestow upon me. I could only reply, 'I wish He would': a very irreverent petition, but a very sincere one, and such as the blessed God, in His due time, was pleased to answer."

It does not appear that previous to this conversation he had ever distinctly realised the tenets which were afterwards to have so much influence over him. For the moment they produced a good effect, but in a few hours their novelty was over—the dark hour returned, and he awoke from slumber

with a "stronger alienation from God than ever". The tenacity with which the mind in moments of excitement appropriates and retains very abstract tenets, that bear even in a slight degree on the topic of its excitement, is as remarkable as the facility and accuracy with which it apprehends them in the midst of so great a tumult. Many changes and many years rolled over Cowper—years of black and dark depression, years of tranquil society, of genial labour, of literary fame, but never in the lightest or darkest hour was he wholly unconscious of the abstract creed of Martin Madan. At the time indeed, the body had its rights, and maintained them.

"While I traversed the apartment, expecting every moment that the earth would open her mouth and swallow me, my conscience scaring me, and the city of refuge out of reach and out of sight, a strange and horrible darkness fell upon me. If it were possible that a heavy blow could light on the brain without touching the skull, such was the sensation I felt. I clapped my hand to my forehead, and cried aloud, through the pain it gave me. At every stroke my thoughts and expressions became more wild and incoherent; all that remained clear was the sense of sin, and the expectation of punishment. These kept undisturbed possession all through my illness, without interruption or abatement."

It is idle to follow details further. The deep waters had passed over him, and it was long before the face of his mind was dry or green again.

He was placed in a lunatic asylum, where he continued many months, and which he left apparently cured. After some changes of no moment, but which by his own account evinced many traces of dangerous excitement, he took up his abode at Huntingdon, with the family of Unwin; and it is remarkable how soon the taste for easy and simple, yet not wholly unintellectual society, which had formerly characterised him, revived again. The delineation cannot be given in any terms but his own :—

"We breakfast commonly between eight and nine; till eleven, we read either the Scripture, or the sermons of some faithful preacher of these holy mysteries; at eleven we attend divine service, which is performed here twice every day; and from twelve to three we separate, and amuse ourselves as we please. During that interval, I either read, in my own apartment, or walk, or ride, or work in the garden. We seldom sit an hour after dinner, but if the weather permits, adjourn to the garden, where, with Mrs. Unwin and her son, I have generally the pleasure of religious conversation till tea-time. If it rains, or is too windy for walking, we either converse within doors, or sing some hymns of Martin's collection, and by the help of Mrs. Unwin's harpsichord, make up a tolerable concert, in which our hearts, I hope, are the best and most musical performers. After tea we sally forth to walk in good earnest. Mrs. Unwin is a good walker, and we have generally travelled about four miles before we see home again. When the days are short, we make this excursion in the former part of the day, between church time and dinner. At night we read, and converse, as before, till supper, and commonly finish the evening either with hymns, or a sermon, and last of all the family are called to prayers. I need not tell *you*, that such a life as this is consistent with the utmost cheerfulness; accordingly we are all happy, and dwell together in unity as brethren. Mrs. Unwin has almost a maternal affection for me, and I have something very like a filial one for her, and her son and I are brothers. Blessed be the God of our salvation for such companions, and for such a life—above all, for a heart to like it."[1]

The scene was not however to last as it was. Mr. Unwin, the husband of Mrs. Unwin, was suddenly killed soon after, and Cowper removed with Mrs. Unwin to Olney, where a new epoch of his life begins.

The curate of Olney at this time was John Newton, a man of great energy of mind, and well known in his generation for several vigorous books, and still more for a very remarkable life. He had been captain of a Liverpool slave ship—an occupation in which he had quite energy enough to have succeeded, but was deeply influenced by serious motives, and became one of the strongest and most active of the Low

[1] Letter to Mrs. Cowper, 20th October, 1766.

Church clergymen of that day. He was one of those men who seem intended to make excellence disagreeable. He was a converting engine. The whole of his own enormous vigour of body—the whole steady intensity of a pushing, impelling, compelling, unoriginal mind—all the mental or corporeal exertion he could exact from the weak or elicit from the strong, were devoted to one sole purpose—the effectual impact of the Calvinistic tenets on the parishioners of Olney. Nor would we hint that his exertions were at all useless. There is no denying that there is a certain stiff, tough, agricultural, clayish English nature, on which the aggressive divine produces a visible and good effect. The hardest and heaviest hammering seems required to stir and warm that close and coarse matter. To impress any sense of the supernatural on so secular a substance is a great good, though that sense be expressed in false or irritating theories. It is unpleasant, no doubt, to hear the hammering; the bystanders are in an evil case; you might as well live near an iron-ship yard. Still, the blows do not hurt the iron. Something of the sort is necessary to beat the coarse ore into a shining and useful shape; certainly that does so beat it. But the case is different when the hundred-handed divine desires to hit others. The very system which, on account of its hard blows, is adapted to the tough and ungentle, is by that very reason unfit for the tremulous and tender. The nature of many men and many women is such that it will not bear the daily and incessant repetition of some certain and indisputable truths. The universe has of course its dark aspect. Many tremendous facts and difficulties can be found which often haunt the timid and sometimes incapacitate the feeble. To be continually insisting on these, and these only, will simply render both more and more unfit for the duties to which they were born. And if this is the case with certain fact and clear truth, how much more with uncertain error

and mystic exaggeration! Mr. Newton was alive to the consequences of his system: "I believe my name is up about the country for preaching people mad; for whether it is owing to the sedentary life women lead here, etc. etc., I suppose we have near a dozen in different degrees disordered in their heads, and most of them, I believe, *truly gracious people*".[1] He perhaps found his peculiar views more generally appreciated among this class of young ladies than among more healthy and rational people, and clearly did not wholly condemn the delivering them, even at this cost, from the tyranny of the "carnal reason".

No more dangerous adviser, if this world had been searched over, could have been found for Cowper. What the latter required was prompt encouragement to cheerful occupation, quiet amusement, gentle and unexhausting society. Mr. Newton thought otherwise. His favourite motto was *Perimus in licitis*. The simple round of daily pleasures and genial employments which give instinctive happiness to the happiest natures, and best cheer the common life of common men, was studiously watched and scrutinised with the energy of a Puritan and the watchfulness of an inquisitor. Mr. Newton had all the tastes and habits which go to form what in the Catholic system is called a spiritual director. Of late years it is well known that the institution, or rather practice, of confession, has expanded into a more potent and more imperious organisation. You are expected by the priests of the Roman Church not only to confess to them what you have done, but to take their advice as to what you shall do. The future is under their direction, as the past was beneath their scrutiny. This was exactly the view which Mr. Newton took of his relation to Cowper. A natural aptitude for dictation—a steady, strong, compelling decision,—great self-

[1] Letter to Thornton.

command, and a sharp perception of all impressible points in the characters of others,—made the task of guiding "weaker brethren" a natural and pleasant pursuit. To suppose that a shrinking, a wounded, and tremulous mind, like that of Cowper's, would rise against such bold dogmatism, such hard volition, such animal nerve, is to fancy that the beaten slave will dare the lash which his very eyes instinctively fear and shun. Mr. Newton's great idea was that Cowper ought to be of some use. There was a great deal of excellent hammering hammered in the parish, and it was sinful that a man with nothing to do should sit tranquil. Several persons in the street had done what they ought not; football was not unknown; cards were played; flirtation was not conducted "improvingly". It was clearly Cowper's duty to put a stop to such things. Accordingly he made him a parochial implement; he set him to visit painful cases, to attend at prayer-meetings, to compose melancholy hymns, even to conduct or share in conducting public services himself. It never seems to have occurred to him that so fragile a mind would be unequal to the burden—that a bruised reed does often break; or rather, if it did occur to him, he regarded it as a subterranean suggestion, and expected a supernatural interference to counteract the events at which it hinted. Yet there are certain rules and principles in this world which seem earthly, but which the most excellent may not on that account venture to disregard. The consequence of placing Cowper in exciting situations was a return of his excitement. It is painful to observe, that though the attack resembled in all its main features his former one, several months passed before Mr. Newton would permit any proper physical remedies to be applied, and then it was too late. We need not again recount details. Many months of dark despondency were to be passed before he returned to a simple and rational mind.

The truth is, that independently of the personal activity and dauntless energy which made Mr. Newton so little likely to sympathise with such a mind as Cowper's, the former lay under a still more dangerous disqualification for Cowper's predominant adviser, *viz.*, an erroneous view of his case. His opinion exactly coincided with that which Cowper first heard from Mr. Madan during his first illness in London. This view is in substance that the depression which Cowper originally suffered from was exactly what almost all mankind, if they had been rightly aware of their true condition, would have suffered also. They were "children of wrath," just as he was; and the only difference between them was, that he appreciated his state and they did not,—showing, in fact, that Cowper was not, as common persons imagined, on the extreme verge of insanity, but, on the contrary, a particularly rational and right-seeing man. "So far," Cowper says, with one of the painful smiles which make his "Narrative" so melancholy, "my condition was less desperate." That is, his counsellors had persuaded him that his malady was rational, and his sufferings befitting his true position,—no difficult task, for they had the poignancy of pain and the pertinacity of madness on their side: the efficacy of their arguments was less when they endeavoured to make known the sources of consolation. We have seen the immediate effect of the first exposition of the evangelical theory of faith. When applied to the case of the morbidly-despairing sinner, that theory has one argumentative imperfection which the logical sharpness of madness will soon discover and point out. The simple reply is: "I do not feel the faith which you describe. I wish I could feel it; but it is no use trying to conceal the fact, I am conscious of nothing like it." And this was substantially Cowper's reply on his first interview with Mr. Madan. It was a simple denial of a fact solely accessible to his personal consciousness; and, as such, un-

answerable. And in this intellectual position (if such it can be called) his mind long rested. At the commencement of his residence at Olney, however, there was a decided change. Whether it were that he mistook the glow of physical recovery for the peace of spiritual renovation, or that some subtler and deeper agency was, as he supposed, at work, the outward sign is certain; and there is no question but that during the first months of his residence at Olney, and his daily intercourse with Mr. Newton, he did feel, or supposed himself to feel, the faith which he was instructed to deem desirable, and he lent himself with natural pleasure to the diffusion of it among those around him. But this theory of salvation requires a metaphysical postulate, which to many minds is simply impossible. A prolonged meditation on unseen realities is sufficiently difficult, and seems scarcely the occupation for which common human nature was intended; but more than this is said to be essential. The meditation must be successful in exciting certain feelings of a kind peculiarly delicate, subtle, and (so to speak) unstable. The wind bloweth where it listeth; but it is scarcely more partial, more quick, more unaccountable, than the glow of an emotion excited by a supernatural and unseen object. This depends on the vigour of imagination which has to conceive that object—on the vivacity of feeling which has to be quickened by it—on the physical energy which has to support it. The very watchfulness, the scrupulous anxiety to find and retain the feeling, are exactly the most unfavourable to it. In a delicate disposition like that of Cowper, such feelings revolt from the inquisition of others, and shrink from the stare of the mind itself. But even this was not the worst. The mind of Cowper was, so to speak, naturally terrestrial. If a man wishes for a nice appreciation of the details of time and sense, let him consult Cowper's miscellaneous letters. Each simple event of every day—each

petty object of external observation or inward suggestion, is there chronicled with a fine and female fondness, a wise and happy faculty, let us say, of deriving a gentle happiness from the tranquil and passing hour. The fortunes of the hares—Bess who died young, and Tiney who lived to be nine years old—the miller who engaged their affections at once, his powdered coat having charms that were irresistible—the knitting-needles of Mrs. Unwin—the qualities of his friend Hill, who managed his money transactions—

> "An honest man, close buttoned to the chin,
> Broadcloth without, and a warm heart within"—

live in his pages, and were the natural, insensible, unbiassed occupants of his fancy. It is easy for a firm and hard mind to despise the minutiæ of life, and to pore and brood over an abstract proposition. It may be possible for the highest, the strongest, the most arduous imagination to live aloof from common things—alone with the unseen world, as some have lived their whole lives in memory with a world which has passed away. But it seems hardly possible that an imagination such as Cowper's—which was rather a detective fancy, perceiving the charm and essence of things which are seen, than an eager, actuating, conceptive power, embodying, enlivening, empowering those which are not seen—should leave its own home—the *domus et tellus*—the sweet fields and rare orchards which it loved,—and go out alone apart from all flesh into the trackless and fearful and unknown Infinite. Of course, his timid mind shrank from it at once, and returned to its own fireside. After a little, the idea that he had a true faith faded away. Mr. Newton, with misdirected zeal, sought to revive it by inciting him to devotional composition; but the only result was the volume of "Olney Hymns"—a very painful record, of which the burthen is—

"My former hopes are fled,
My terror now begins;
I feel, alas! that I am dead
In trespasses and sins.

"And whither shall I fly?
I hear the thunder roar;
The law proclaims destruction nigh,
And vengeance at the door."

"The Preacher" himself did not conceive such a store of melancholy forebodings.

The truth is, that there are two remarkable species of minds on which the doctrine of Calvinism acts as a deadly and fatal poison. One is the natural, vigorous, bold, defiant, hero-like character, abounding in generosity, in valour, in vigour, and abounding also in self-will, and pride, and scorn. This is the temperament which supplies the world with ardent hopes and keen fancies, with springing energies, and bold plans, and noble exploits; but yet, under another aspect and in other times, is equally prompt in desperate deeds, awful machinations, deep and daring crimes. It one day is ready by its innate heroism to deliver the world from any tyranny; the next it "hungers to become a tyrant" in its turn. Yet the words of the poet are ever true and are ever good, as a defence against the cold narrators who mingle its misdeeds and exploits, and profess to believe that each is a set-off and compensation for the other. You can ever say:—

"Still he retained,
'Mid much abasement, what he had received
From Nature, an intense and glowing mind". [1]

It is idle to tell such a mind that, by an arbitrary irrespective election, it is chosen to happiness or doomed to

[1] Wordsworth: *Excursion*, book i.

perdition. The evil and the good in it equally revolt at such terms. It thinks: "Well, if the universe be a tyrant, if one man is doomed to misery for no fault, and the next is chosen to pleasure for no merit—if the favouritism of time be copied into eternity—if the highest heaven be indeed like the meanest earth,—then, as the heathen say, it is better to suffer injustice than to inflict it, better to be the victims of the eternal despotism than its ministers, better to curse in hell than serve in heaven". And the whole burning soul breaks away into what is well called Satanism—into wildness, and bitterness, and contempt.

Cowper had as little in common with this proud, Titanic, aspiring genius as any man has or can have, but his mind was equally injured by the same system. On a timid, lounging, gentle, acquiescent mind, the effect is precisely the contrary—singularly contrasted, but equally calamitous. "I am doomed, you tell me, already. One way or other the matter is already settled. It can be no better, and it is as bad as it can be. Let me alone; do not trouble me at least these few years. Let me at least sit sadly and bewail myself. Action is useless. I will brood upon my melancholy and be at rest;" the soul sinks into "passionless calm and silence unreproved," [1] flinging away "the passionate tumult of a clinging hope," [2] which is the allotted boon and happiness of mortality. It was, as we believe, straight towards this terrible state that Mr. Newton directed Cowper. He kept him occupied with subjects which were too great for him; he kept him away from his natural life; he presented to him views and opinions but too well justifying his deep and dark insanity; he convinced him that he ought to experience emotions which were foreign to his nature; he had nothing to add by way of comfort, when told that those emotions did not and could not exist. Cowper seems to have felt this.

[1] Shelley: "The Sunset". [2] *Ibid.*: "Alastor".

His second illness commenced with a strong dislike to his spiritual adviser, and it may be doubted if there ever was again the same cordiality between them. Mr. Newton, too, as was natural, was vexed at Cowper's calamity. His reputation in the "religious world" was deeply pledged to conducting this most "interesting case" to a favourable termination. A failure was not to be contemplated, and yet it was obviously coming and coming. It was to no purpose that Cowper acquired fame and secular glory in the literary world. This was rather adding gall to bitterness. The unbelievers in evangelical religion would be able to point to one at least, and that the best known among its proselytes, to whom it had not brought peace—whom it had rather confirmed in wretchedness. His literary fame, too, took Cowper away into a larger circle, out of the rigid decrees and narrow ordinances of his father-confessor, and of course the latter remonstrated. Altogether there was not a cessation, but a decline and diminution of intercourse. But better, according to the saying, had they "never met or never parted".[1] If a man is to have a father-confessor, let him at least choose a sensible one. The dominion of Mr. Newton had been exercised, not indeed with mildness, or wisdom, or discrimination, but, nevertheless, with strong judgment and coarse acumen—with a bad choice of ends, but at least a vigorous selection of means. Afterwards it was otherwise. In the village of Olney there was a schoolmaster, whose name often occurs in Cowper's letters,—a foolish, vain, worthy sort of man: what the people of the west call a "scholard," that is, a man of more knowledge and less sense than those about him. He sometimes came to Cowper to beg old clothes, sometimes to instruct him with literary criticisms, and is known in the "Correspondence" as "Mr. Teedon, who reads the *Monthly Review*," "Mr. Teedon, whose smile is fame".

[1] Burns: "Fare thee weel, thou best and dearest".

Yet to this man, whose harmless follies his humour had played with a thousand times, Cowper, in his later years, and when the dominion of Mr. Newton had so far ceased as to leave him, after many years, the use of his own judgment, resorted for counsel and guidance. And the man had visions, and dreams, and revelations! But enough of such matters.

The peculiarity of Cowper's life is its division into marked periods. From his birth to his first illness he may be said to have lived in one world, and for some twenty years afterwards, from his thirty-second to about his fiftieth year, in a wholly distinct one. Much of the latter time was spent in hopeless despondency. His principal companions during that period were Mr. Newton, about whom we have been writing, and Mrs. Unwin, who may be said to have broken the charmed circle of seclusion in which they lived by inciting Cowper to continuous literary composition. Of Mrs. Unwin herself ample memorials remain. She was, in truth, a most excellent person—in mind and years much older than the poet—as it were by profession elderly, able in every species of preserve, profound in salts, and pans, and jellies; culinary by taste; by tact and instinct motherly and housewifish. She was not however without some less larderiferous qualities. Lady Hesketh and Lady Austen, neither of them very favourably prejudiced critics, decided so. The former has written: "She is very far from grave; on the contrary, she is cheerful and gay, and laughs *de bon cœur* upon the smallest provocation. Amidst all the little puritanical words which fall from her *de tems en tems*, she seems to have by nature a great fund of gaiety. . . . I must say, too, that she seems to be very well read in the English poets, as appears by several little quotations which she makes from time to time, and has a true taste for what is excellent in that way." This she showed by persuading Cowper to the composition of his first volume.

As a poet, Cowper belongs, though with some differences, to the school of Pope. Great question, as is well known, has been raised whether that very accomplished writer was a poet at all; and a secondary and equally debated question runs side by side, whether, if a poet, he were a great one. With the peculiar genius and personal rank of Pope we have in this article nothing to do. But this much may be safely said, that according to the definition which has been ventured of the poetical art, by the greatest and most accomplished master of the other school, his works are delicately finished specimens of artistic excellence in one branch of it. "Poetry," says Shelley, who was surely a good judge, "is the expression of the imagination,"[1] by which he meant, of course, not only the expression of the interior sensations accompanying the faculty's employment, but likewise, and more emphatically, the exercise of it in the delineation of objects which attract it. Now society, viewed as a whole, is clearly one of those objects. There is a vast assemblage of human beings, of all nations, tongues, and languages, each with ideas, and a personality and a cleaving mark of its own, yet each having somewhat that resembles something of all, much that resembles a part of many—a motley regiment, of various forms, of a million impulses, passions, thoughts, fancies, motives, actions; a "many-headed monster thing";[2] a Bashi Bazouk array; a clown to be laughed at; a hydra to be spoken evil of; yet, in fine, our all—the very people of the whole earth. There is nothing in nature more attractive to the fancy than this great spectacle and congregation. Since Herodotus went to and fro to the best of his ability over all the earth, the spectacle of civilisation has ever drawn to itself the quick eyes and quick tongues of seeing and roving men. Not only, says Goethe, is man ever interesting to man, but "properly there is nothing else

[1] *Defence of Poetry.* [2] *Lady of the Lake*, canto vi.

interesting". There is a distinct subject for poetry—at least according to Shelley's definition—in selecting and working out, in idealising, in combining, in purifying, in intensifying the great features and peculiarities which make society, as a whole, interesting, remarkable, fancy-taking. No doubt it is not the object of poetry to versify the works of the eminent narrators, "to prose," according to a disrespectful description, "o'er books of travelled seamen," to chill you with didactic icebergs, to heat you with torrid sonnets. The difficulty of reading such local narratives is now great—so great that a gentleman in the reviewing department once wished "one man would go everywhere and say everything," in order that the limit of his labour at least might be settled and defined. And it would certainly be much worse if palm-trees were of course to be in rhyme, and the dinner of the migrator only recountable in blank verse. We do not wish this. We only maintain that there are certain principles, causes, passions, affections, acting on and influencing communities at large, permeating their life, ruling their principles, directing their history, working as a subtle and wandering principle over all their existence. These have a somewhat abstract character, as compared with the soft ideals and passionate incarnations of purely individual character, and seem dull beside the stirring lays of eventful times in which the earlier and bolder poets delight. Another cause co-operates. The tendency of civilisation is to pare away the oddness and license of personal character, and to leave a monotonous agreeableness as the sole trait and comfort of mankind. This obviously tends to increase the efficacy of general principles, to bring to view the daily efficacy of constant causes, to suggest the hidden agency of subtle abstractions. Accordingly, as civilisation augments and philosophy grows, we commonly find a school of "common-sense" poets, as they may be called, arise and develop, who proceed

to depict what they see around them, to describe its *natura naturans*, to delineate its *natura naturata*, to evolve productive agencies, to teach subtle ramifications. Complete, as the most characteristic specimen of this class of poets, stands Pope. He was, some one we think has said, the sort of person we cannot even conceive existing in a barbarous age. His subject was not life at large, but fashionable life. He described the society in which he was thrown—the people among whom he lived. His mind was a hoard of small maxims, a quintessence of petty observations. When he described character, he described it, not dramatically, nor as it is in itself; but observantly and from without, calling up in the mind not so much a vivid conception of the man, of the real, corporeal, substantial being, as an idea of the idea which a metaphysical bystander might refine and excruciate concerning him. Society in Pope is scarcely a society of people, but of pretty little atoms, coloured and painted with hoops or in coats—a miniature of metaphysics, a puppet-show of sylphs. He elucidates the doctrine, that the tendency of civilised poetry is towards an analytic sketch of the existing civilisation. Nor is the effect diminished by the pervading character of keen judgment and minute intrusive sagacity; for no great painter of English life can be without a rough sizing of strong sense, or he would fail from want of sympathy with his subject. Pope exemplifies the class and type of "common-sense" poets who substitute an animated "*catalogue raisonné*" of working thoughts and operative principles —a sketch of the then present society, as a whole and as an object, for the κλέα ανδρῶν the tale of which is one subject of early verse, and the stage effect of living, loving, passionate, impetuous men and women, which is the special topic of another.

What Pope is to our fashionable and town life, Cowper is to our domestic and rural life. This is perhaps the reason

why he is so national. It has been said no foreigner can live in the country. We doubt whether any people, who felt their whole heart and entire exclusive breath of their existence to be concentrated in a great capital, could or would appreciate such intensely provincial pictures as are the entire scope of Cowper's delineation. A good many imaginative persons are really plagued with him. Everything is so comfortable; the tea-urn hisses so plainly, the toast is so warm, the breakfast so neat, the food so edible, that one turns away, in excitable moments, a little angrily from anything so quiet, tame, and sober. Have we not always hated this life? What can be worse than regular meals, clock-moving servants, a time for everything, and everything then done, a place for everything, without the Irish alleviation—"Sure, and I'm rejiced to say, that's jist and exactly where it isn't," a common gardener, a slow parson, a heavy assortment of near relations, a placid house flowing with milk and sugar—all that the fates can stuff together of substantial comfort, and fed and fatted monotony? Aspiring and excitable youth stoutly maintains it can endure anything much better than the "gross fog Bœotian"—the torpid, in-door, tea-tabular felicity. Still a great deal of tea is really consumed in the English nation. A settled and practical people are distinctly in favour of heavy relaxations, placid prolixities, slow comforts. A state between the mind and the body, something intermediate half-way from the newspaper to a nap—this is what we may call the middle-life theory of the influential English gentleman—the true aspiration of the ruler of the world.

> "'Tis then the understanding takes repose
> In indolent vacuity of thought,
> And sleeps and is refreshed. Meanwhile the face
> Conceals the mood lethargic with a mask
> Of deep deliberation."[1]

[1] "The Task."

It is these in-door scenes, this common world, this gentle round of "calm delights," the trivial course of slowly-moving pleasures, the petty detail of quiet relaxation, that Cowper excels in. The post-boy, the winter's evening, the newspaper, the knitting needles, the stockings, the waggon—these are his subjects. His sure popularity arises from his having held up to the English people exact delineations of what they really prefer. Perhaps one person in four hundred understands Wordsworth, about one in eight thousand may appreciate Shelley, but there is no expressing the small fraction who do not love dulness, who do not enter into—

> "Home-born happiness,
> Fireside enjoyments, intimate delights,
> And all the comforts that the lowly roof
> Of undisturbed retirement, and the hours
> Of long uninterrupted evening know". [1]

His objection to the more exciting and fashionable pleasures was perhaps, in an extreme analysis, that they put him out. They were too great a task for his energies—asked too much for his spirits. His comments on them rather remind us of Mr. Rushworth's—Miss Austen's heavy hero—remark on the theatre: "I think we went on much better by ourselves before this was thought of, doing, doing, doing *nothing*".[2]

The subject of these pictures, in point of interest, may be what we choose to think it, but there is no denying great merit to the execution. The sketches have the highest merit—suitableness of style. It would be absurd to describe a post-boy as a sonneteer his mistress—to cover his plain face with fine similes—to put forward the "brow of Egypt"—to stick metaphors upon him, as the Americans upon General Washington. The only merit such topics have room for is an easy and dextrous plainness—a sober suit of

[1] "The Task." [2] *Mansfield Park*, chap. xix.

well-fitting expressions—a free, working, flowing, picturesque garb of words adapted to the solid conduct of a sound and serious world, and this merit Cowper's style has. On the other hand, it entirely wants the higher and rarer excellences of poetical expression. There is none of the choice art which has studiously selected the words of one class of great poets, or the rare, untaught, unteachable felicity which has vivified those of others. No one, in reading Cowper, stops as if to draw his breath more deeply over words which do not so much express or clothe poetical ideas, as seem to intertwine, coalesce, and be blended with, the very essence of poetry itself.

Of course a poet could not deal in any measure with such subjects as Cowper dealt with, and not become inevitably, to a certain extent, satirical. The ludicrous is in some sort the imagination of common life. The "dreary intercourse"[1] of which Wordsworth makes mention, would be dreary, unless some people possessed more than he did the faculty of making fun. A universe in which Dignity No. I conversed decorously with Dignity No. II. on topics befitting their state, would be perhaps a levee of great intellects and a tea-table of enormous thoughts; but it would want the best charm of this earth—the medley of great things and little, of things mundane and things celestial, things low and things awful, of things eternal and things of half a minute. It is in this contrast that humour and satire have their place—pointing out the intense unspeakable incongruity of the groups and juxtapositions of our world. To all of these which fell under his own eye, Cowper was alive. A gentle sense of propriety and consistency in daily things was evidently characteristic of him; and if he fail of the highest success in this species of art, it is not from an imperfect treatment of the scenes and conceptions which he touched,

[1] "Tintern Abbey."

but from the fact that the follies with which he deals are not the greatest follies—that there are deeper absurdities in human life than "John Gilpin" touches upon—that the superficial occurrences of ludicrous life do not exhaust, or even deeply test, the mirthful resources of our minds and fortunes.

As a scold, we think Cowper failed. He had a great idea of the use of railing, and there are many pages of laudable invective against various vices which we feel no call whatever to defend. But a great vituperator had need to be a hater; and of any real rage, any such gall and bitterness as great and irritable satirists have in other ages let loose upon men, of any thorough, brooding, burning, abiding detestation, he was as incapable as a tame hare. His vituperation reads like the mild man's whose wife ate up his dinner, "Really, sir, I feel quite *angry!*" Nor has his language any of the sharp intrusive acumen which divides in sunder both soul and spirit, and makes fierce and unforgetable reviling.

Some people may be surprised, notwithstanding our lengthy explanation, at hearing Cowper treated as of the school of Pope. It has been customary, at least with some critics, to speak of him as one of those who recoiled from the artificiality of that great writer, and at least commenced a return to a simple delineation of outward nature. And of course there is considerable truth in this idea. The poetry (if such it is) of Pope would be just as true if all the trees were yellow and all the grass flesh-colour. He did not care for "snowy scalps," or "rolling streams," or "icy halls," or "precipice's gloom". Nor, for that matter, did Cowper either. He, as Hazlitt most justly said, was as much afraid of a shower of rain as any man that ever lived. At the same time, the fashionable life described by Pope has no reference whatever to the beauties of the material universe, never regards them, could go on just as well in the soft, sloppy, gelatinous existence which Dr. Whewell (who knows) says

is alone possible in Jupiter and Saturn. But the rural life of Cowper's poetry has a constant and necessary reference to the country, is identified with its features, cannot be separated from it even in fancy. Green fields and a slow river seem all the material of beauty Cowper had given him. But what was more to the purpose, his attention was well concentrated upon them. As he himself said, he did not go more than thirty miles from home for twenty years, and very seldom as far. He was, therefore, well able to find out all that was charming in Olney and its neighbourhood, and as it presented nothing which is not to be found in any of the fresh rural parts of England, what he has left us is really a delicate description and appreciative delineation of the simple essential English country.

However, it is to be remarked that the description of nature in Cowper differs altogether from the peculiar delineation of the same subject, which has been so influential in more recent times, and which bears, after its greatest master, the name Wordsworthian. To Cowper Nature is simply a background, a beautiful background no doubt, but still essentially a *locus in quo*—a space in which the work and mirth of life pass and are performed. A more professedly formal delineation does not occur than the following:—

> "O Winter! ruler of the inverted year,
> Thy scattered hair with sleet-like ashes filled,
> Thy breath congealed upon thy lips, thy cheeks
> Fringed with a beard made white with other snows
> Than those of age, thy forehead wrapped in clouds,
> A leafless branch thy sceptre, and thy throne
> A sliding car, indebted to no wheels,
> But urged by storms along its slippery way;
> I love thee, all unlovely as thou seemest,
> And dreaded as thou art. Thou holdest the sun
> A prisoner in the yet undawning east,
> Shortening his journey between morn and noon,

> And hurrying him, impatient of his stay,
> Down to the rosy west; but kindly still
> Compensating his loss with added hours
> Of social converse and instructive ease,
> And gathering, at short notice, in one group
> The family dispersed, and fixing thought,
> Not less dispersed by daylight and its cares
> I crown thee King of intimate delights,
> Fireside enjoyments, home-born happiness,
> And all the comforts that the lowly roof
> Of undisturbed retirement, and the hours
> Of long uninterrupted evening know.
> No rattling wheels stop short before these gates." [1]

After a very few lines he returns within doors to the occupation of man and woman—to human tasks and human pastimes. To Wordsworth, on the contrary, Nature is a religion. So far from being unwilling to treat her as a special object of study, he hardly thought any other equal or comparable. He was so far from holding the doctrine that the earth was made for men to live in, that it would rather seem as if he thought men were created to see the earth. The whole aspect of Nature was to him a special revelation of an immanent and abiding power—a breath of the pervading art—a smile of the Eternal Mind—according to the lines which every one knows,—

> "A sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused;
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean, and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things". [2]

Of this haunting, supernatural, mystical view of Nature Cowper never heard. Like the strong old lady who said,

[1] "The Task." [2] Wordsworth: "Tintern Abbey".

"*She* was born before nerves were invented," he may be said to have lived before the awakening of the detective sensibility which reveals this deep and obscure doctrine.

In another point of view, also, Cowper is curiously contrasted with Wordsworth, as a delineator of Nature. The delineation of Cowper is a simple delineation. He makes a sketch of the object before him, and there he leaves it. Wordsworth, on the contrary, is not satisfied unless he describe not only the bare outward object which others see, but likewise the reflected high-wrought feelings which that object excites in a brooding, self-conscious mind. His subject was not so much Nature, as Nature reflected by Wordsworth. Years of deep musing and long introspection had made him familiar with every shade and shadow in the many-coloured impression which the universe makes on meditative genius and observant sensibility. Now these feelings Cowper did not describe, because, to all appearance, he did not perceive them. He had a great pleasure in watching the common changes and common aspects of outward things, but he was not invincibly prone to brood and pore over their reflex effects upon his own mind.

> "A primrose by the river's brim,
> A yellow primrose was to him,
> And it was nothing more."[1]

According to the account which Cowper at first gave of his literary occupations, his entire design was to communicate the religious views to which he was then a convert. He fancied that the vehicle of verse might bring many to listen to truths which they would be disinclined to have stated to them in simple prose. And however tedious the recurrence of these theological tenets may be to the common reader, it is certain that a considerable portion of Cowper's peculiar popularity may be traced to their expression. He is the one

[1] Wordsworth: "Peter Bell".

poet of a class which have no poets. In that once large and still considerable portion of the English world which regards the exercise of the fancy and the imagination as dangerous—snares, as they speak—distracting the soul from an intense consideration of abstract doctrine, Cowper's strenuous inculcation of those doctrines has obtained for him a certain toleration. Of course all verse is perilous. The use of single words is harmless, but the employment of two, in such a manner as to form a rhyme—the regularities of interval and studied recurrence of the same sound, evince an attention to time, and a partiality to things of sense. Most poets must be prohibited; the exercise of the fancy requires watching. But Cowper is a ticket-of-leave man. He has the chaplain's certificate. He has expressed himself "with the utmost propriety". The other imaginative criminals must be left to the fates, but he may be admitted to the sacred drawing-room, though with constant care and scrupulous *surveillance*. Perhaps, however, taken in connection with his diseased and peculiar melancholy, these tenets really add to the artistic effect of Cowper's writings. The free discussion of daily matters, the delicate delineation of domestic detail, the passing narrative of fugitive occurrences, would seem light and transitory, if it were not broken by the interruption of a terrible earnestness, and relieved by the dark background of a deep and foreboding sadness. It is scarcely artistic to describe the "painted veil which those who live call life,"[1] and leave wholly out of view and undescribed "the chasm sightless and drear,"[2] which lies always beneath and around it.

It is of "The Task" more than of Cowper's earlier volume of poems that a critic of his poetry must more peculiarly be understood to speak. All the best qualities of his genius are there concentrated, and the alloy is less than elsewhere. He

[1] Shelley: "Sonnet," 1813. [2] *Ibid.*

was fond of citing the saying of Dryden, that the rhyme had often helped him to a thought—a great but very perilous truth. The difficulty is, that the rhyme so frequently helps to the wrong thought—that the stress of the mind is recalled from the main thread of the poem, from the narrative, or sentiment, or delineation, to some wayside remark or fancy, which the casual resemblance of final sound suggests. This is fatal, unless either a poet's imagination be so hot and determined as to bear down upon its objects, and to be unwilling to hear the voice of any charmer who might distract it, or else the nature of the poem itself should be of so desultory a character that it does not much matter about the sequence of the thought—at least within great and ample limits, as in some of Swift's casual rhymes, where the sound is in fact the connecting link of unity. Now Cowper is not often in either of these positions; he always has a thread of argument on which he is hanging his illustrations, and yet he has not the exclusive interest or the undeviating energetic downrightness of mind which would ensure his going through it without idling or turning aside; consequently the thoughts which the rhyme suggests are constantly breaking in upon the main matter, destroying the emphatic unity which is essential to rhythmical delineation. His blank verse of course is exempt from this defect, and there is moreover something in the nature of the metre which fits it for the expression of studious and quiet reflection. "The Task" too was composed at the healthiest period of Cowper's later life, in the full vigour of his faculties, and with the spur that the semi-recognition of his first volume had made it a common subject of literary discussion, whether he was a poet or not. Many men could endure—as indeed all but about ten do actually in every generation endure—to be without this distinction; but few could have an idea that it was a frequent point of argument whether they were duly

entitled to possess it or not, without at least a strong desire to settle the question by some work of decisive excellence. This "The Task" achieved for Cowper. Since its publication his name has been a household word—a particularly household word in English literature. The story of its composition is connected with one of the most curious incidents in Cowper's later life, and has given occasion to a good deal of writing.

In the summer of 1781 it happened that two ladies called at a shop exactly opposite the house at Olney where Cowper and Mrs. Unwin resided. One of these was a familiar and perhaps tame object,—a Mrs. Jones,—the wife of a neighbouring parson; the other, however, was so striking, that Cowper, one of the shyest and least demonstrative of men, immediately asked Mrs. Unwin to invite her to tea. This was a great event, as it would appear that few or no social interruptions, casual or contemplated, then varied what Cowper called the "duality of his existence". This favoured individual was Lady Austen, a person of what Mr. Hayley terms "colloquial talents"; in truth an energetic, vivacious, amusing, and rather handsome lady of the world. She had been much in France, and is said to have caught the facility of manner and love of easy society, which is the unchanging characteristic of that land of change. She was a fascinating person in the great world, and it is not difficult to imagine she must have been an excitement indeed at Olney. She was, however, most gracious; fell in love, as Cowper says, not only with him but with Mrs. Unwin; was called "Sister Ann," laughed and made laugh, was every way so great an acquisition that his seeing her appeared to him to show "strong marks of providential interposition". He thought her superior to the curate's wife, who was a "valuable person," but had a family, etc., etc. The new acquaintance had much to contribute to the Olney conversation. She had

seen much of the world, and probably seen it well, and had at least a good deal to narrate concerning it. Among other interesting matters, she one day recounted to Cowper the story of John Gilpin, as one which she had heard in childhood, and in a short time the poet sent her the ballad, which every one has liked ever since. It was written, he says, no doubt truly, in order to relieve a fit of terrible and uncommon despondency; but altogether, for a few months after the introduction of this new companion, he was more happy and animated than at any other time after his first illness. Clouds, nevertheless, began to show themselves soon. The circumstances are of the minute and female kind, which it would require a good deal of writing to describe, even if we knew them perfectly. The original cause of misconstruction was a rather romantic letter of Lady Austen, drawing a sublime picture of what she expected from Cowper's friendship. Mr. Scott, the clergyman at Olney, who had taken the place of Mr. Newton, and who is described as a dry and sensible man, gave a short account of what he thought was the real embroilment. "Who," said he, "can be surprised that two women should be daily in the society of one man and then quarrel with *one another?*" Cowper's own description shows how likely this was.

"From a scene of the most uninterrupted retirement," he says to Mr. Unwin, "we have passed at once into a state of constant engagement. Not that our society is much multiplied; the addition of an individual has made all this difference. Lady Austen and we pass our days alternately at each other's *château*. In the morning I walk with one or other of the ladies, and in the afternoon wind thread. Thus did Hercules, and thus probably did Samson, and thus do I; and were both those heroes living, I should not fear to challenge them to a trial of skill in that business, or doubt to beat them both. As to killing lions and other amusements of that kind, with which they were so delighted, I should be their humble servant and beg to be excused."

Things were in this state when she suggested to him the

composition of a new poem of some length in blank verse, and on being asked to suggest a subject, said: "Well, write upon that sofa," whence is the title of the first book of "The Task". According to Cowper's own account, it was this poem which was the cause of the ensuing dissension.

"On her first settlement in our neighbourhood, I made it my own particular business (for at that time I was not employed in writing, having published my first volume, and not begun my second) to pay my devoirs to her ladyship every morning at eleven. Customs very soon become laws. I began 'The Task'; for she was the lady who gave me the Sofa for a subject. Being once engaged in the work, I began to feel the inconvenience of my morning attendance. We had seldom breakfasted ourselves till ten: and the intervening hour was all the time that I could find in the whole day for writing; and occasionally it would happen that the half of that hour was all that I could secure for the purpose. But there was no remedy. Long usage had made that which at first was optional, a point of good manners, and consequently of necessity, and I was forced to neglect 'The Task,' to attend upon the Muse who had inspired the subject. But she had ill health, and before I had quite finished the work was obliged to repair to Bristol."

And it is possible that this is the true account of the matter. Yet we fancy there is a kind of awkwardness and constraint in the manner in which it is spoken of. Of course the plain and literal portion of mankind have set it down at once that Cowper was in love with Lady Austen, just as they married him over and over again to Mrs. Unwin. But of a strong passionate love, as we have before explained, we do not think Cowper capable, and there are certainly no signs of it in this case. There is, however, one odd circumstance. Years after, when no longer capable of original composition, he was fond of hearing all his poems read to him except "John Gilpin". There were recollections, he said, connected with those verses which were too painful. Did he mean, the worm that dieth not—the reminiscence of the animated narratress of that not intrinsically melancholy legend?

The literary success of Cowper opened to him a far larger circle of acquaintance, and connected him in close bonds with many of his relations, who had looked with an unfavourable eye at the peculiar tenets which he had adopted, and the peculiar and recluse life which he had been advised to lead. It is to these friends and acquaintance that we owe that copious correspondence on which so much of Cowper's fame at present rests. The complete letter-writer is now an unknown animal. In the last century, when communications were difficult, and epistles rare, there were a great many valuable people who devoted a good deal of time to writing elaborate letters. You wrote letters to a man whom you knew nineteen years and a half ago, and told him what you had for dinner, and what your second cousin said, and how the crops got on. Every detail of life was described and dwelt on, and improved. The art of writing, at least of writing easily, was comparatively rare, which kept the number of such compositions within narrow limits. Sir Walter Scott says he knew a man who remembered that the London post-bag once came to Edinburgh with only one letter in it. One can fancy the solemn conscientious elaborateness with which a person would write, with the notion that his letter would have a whole coach and a whole bag to itself, and travel two hundred miles alone, the exclusive object of a red guard's care. The only thing like it now—the deferential minuteness with which one public office writes to another, conscious that the letter will travel on her Majesty's service three doors down the passage—sinks by comparison into cursory brevity. No administrative reform will be able to bring even the official mind of these days into the grave inch-an-hour conscientiousness with which a confidential correspondent of a century ago related the growth of apples, the manufacture of jams, the appearance of flirtations, and other such things. All the ordinary

incidents of an easy life were made the most of; a party was epistolary capital, a race a mine of wealth. So deeply sentimental was this intercourse, that it was much argued whether the affections were created for the sake of the ink, or ink for the sake of the affections. Thus it continued for many years, and the fruits thereof are written in the volumes of family papers, which daily appear, are praised as "materials for the historian," and consigned, as the case may be, to posterity or oblivion. All this has now passed away. Sir Rowland Hill is entitled to the credit, not only of introducing stamps, but also of destroying letters. The amount of annotations which will be required to make the notes of this day intelligible to posterity is a wonderful idea, and no quantity of comment will make them readable. You might as well publish a collection of telegrams. The careful detail, the studious minuteness, the circumstantial statement of a former time, is exchanged for a curt brevity or only half-intelligible narration. In old times, letters were written for people who knew nothing and required to be told everything. Now they are written for people who know everything except the one thing which the letter is designed to explain to them. It is impossible in some respects not to regret the old practice. It is well that each age should write for itself a faithful account of its habitual existence. We do this to a certain extent in novels, but novels are difficult materials for an historian. They raise a cause and a controversy as to how far they are really faithful delineations. Lord Macaulay is even now under criticism for his use of the plays of the seventeenth century. Letters are generally true on certain points. The least veracious man will tell truly the colour of his coat, the hour of his dinner, the materials of his shoes. The unconscious delineation of a recurring and familiar life is beyond the reach of a fraudulent fancy. Horace Walpole was not a very scrupulous narrator; yet it was too much

trouble even for him to tell lies on many things. His set stories and conspicuous scandals are no doubt often unfounded, but there is a gentle undercurrent of daily unremarkable life and manners which he evidently assumed as a datum for his historical imagination. Whence posterity will derive this for the times of Queen Victoria it is difficult to fancy. Even memoirs are no resource; they generally leave out the common life, and try at least to bring out the uncommon events.

It is evident that this species of composition exactly harmonised with the temperament and genius of Cowper. Detail was his forte and quietness his element. Accordingly, his delicate humour plays over perhaps a million letters, mostly descriptive of events which no one else would have thought worth narrating, and yet which, when narrated, show to us, and will show to persons to whom it will be yet more strange, the familiar, placid, easy, ruminating, provincial existence of our great-grandfathers. Slow, Olney might be,—indescribable, it certainly was not. We seem to have lived there ourselves.

The most copious subject of Cowper's correspondence is his translation of Homer. This was published by subscription, and it is pleasant to observe the healthy facility with which one of the shyest men in the world set himself to extract guineas from every one he had ever heard of. In several cases he was very successful. The University of Oxford, he tells us, declined, as of course it would, to recognise the principle of subscribing towards literary publications; but other public bodies and many private persons were more generous. It is to be wished that their aid had contributed to the production of a more pleasing work. The fact is, Cowper was not like Agamemnon. The most conspicuous feature in the Greek heroes is a certain brisk, decisive activity, which always strikes and always

likes to strike. This quality is faithfully represented in the poet himself. Homer is the briskest of men. The Germans have denied that there was any such person; but they have never questioned his extreme activity. "From what you tell me, sir," said an American, "I should like to have read Homer. I should say he was a go-ahead party." Now this is exactly what Cowper was not. His genius was domestic, and tranquil, and calm. He had no sympathy, or little sympathy, even with the common, half-asleep activities of a refined society; an evening party was too much for him; a day's hunt a preposterous excitement. It is absurd to expect a man like this to sympathise with the stern stimulants of a barbaric age, with a race who fought because they liked it, and a poet who sang of fighting because he thought their taste judicious. As if to make matters worse, Cowper selected a metre in which it would be scarcely possible for any one, however gifted, to translate Homer. The two kinds of metrical composition most essentially opposed to one another are ballad poetry and blank verse. The very nature of the former requires a marked pause and striking rhythm. Every line should have a distinct end and a clear beginning. It is like martial music, there should be a tramp in the very versification of it.

> "Armour rusting in his halls,
> On the blood of Clifford calls;
> 'Quell the Scot,' exclaims the lance,
> Bear me to the heart of France,
> Is the longing of the shield:
> Tell thy name, thou trembling field,
> Field of death, where'er thou be,
> Groan thou with our victory."[1]

And this is the tone of Homer. The grandest of human

[1] Wordsworth: "Feast of Brougham Castle".

tongues marches forward with its proudest steps : the clearest tones call forward—the most marked of metres carries him on :—

> " Like a reappearing star,
> Like a glory from afar—" [1]

he ever heads, and will head, " the flock of war ".[2] Now blank verse is the exact opposite of all this. Dr. Johnson laid down that it was verse only to the eye, which was a bold dictum. But without going this length it will be safe to say, that of all considerable metres in our language it has the least distinct conclusion, least decisive repetition, the least trumpet-like rhythm ; and it is this of which Cowper made choice. He had an idea that extreme literalness was an unequalled advantage, and logically reasoned that it was easier to do this in that metre than in any other. He did not quite hold with Mr. Cobbett that the " gewgaw fetters of rhyme were invented by the monks to enslave the people " ; but as a man who had due experience of both, he was aware that it is easier to write two lines of different endings than two lines of the same ending, and supposed that by taking advantage of this to preserve the exact grammatical meaning of his author, he was indisputably approximating to a good translation. " Whether," he writes, " a translation of Homer may be best executed in blank verse or in rhyme is a question in the decision of which no man finds difficulty who has ever duly considered what translation ought to be, or who is in any degree practically acquainted with those kinds of versification. . . . No human ingenuity can be equal to the task of closing every couplet with sounds homotonous, expressing at the same time the full sense, and only the full sense, of the original." And if the true object of translation were to save the labour and dictionaries of construing school-

[1] Wordsworth: " Feast of Brougham Castle ". [2] *Ibid.*

boys, there is no question but this slavish adherence to the original would be the most likely to gain the approbation of those diminutive but sure judges. But if the object is to convey an idea of the general tone, scope, and artistic effect of the original, the mechanical copying of the details is as likely to end in a good result as a careful cast from a dead man's features to produce a living and speaking being. On the whole, therefore, the condemnation remains, that Homer is not dull, and Cowper is.

With the translation of Homer terminated all the brightest period of Cowper's life. There is little else to say. He undertook an edition of Milton—a most difficult task, involving the greatest and most accurate learning, in theology, in classics, in Italian—in a word, in all ante-Miltonic literature. By far the greater portion of this lay quite out of Cowper's path. He had never been a hard student, and his evident incapacity for the task troubled and vexed him. A man who had never been able to assume any real responsibility was not likely to feel comfortable under the weight of a task which very few men would be able to accomplish. Mrs. Unwin too fell into a state of helplessness and despondency; and instead of relying on her for cheerfulness and management, he was obliged to manage for her, and cheer her. His mind was unequal to the task. Gradually the dark cloud of melancholy, which had hung about him so long, grew and grew, and extended itself day by day. In vain Lord Thurlow, who was a likely man to know, assured him that his spiritual despondency was without ground; he smiled sadly, but seemed to think that at any rate he was not going into Chancery. In vain Hayley, a rival poet, but a good-natured, blundering, well-intentioned, incoherent man, went to and fro, getting the Lord Chief Justice and other dignitaries to attest, under their hands, that they concurred in Thurlow's opinion. In vain, with far wiser kindness, his relatives, especially many of his mother's

family, from whom he had been long divided, but who gradually drew nearer to him as they were wanted, endeavoured to divert his mind to healthful labour and tranquil society. The day of these things had passed away—the summer was ended. He became quite unequal to original composition, and his greatest pleasure was hearing his own writings read to him. After a long period of hopeless despondency he died on 25th April, in the first year of this century; and if he needs an epitaph, let us say, that not in vain was he Nature's favourite. As a higher poet sings:—

"And all day long I number yet,
All seasons through, another debt,
Which I, wherever thou art met,
To thee am owing;
An instinct call it, a blind sense,
A happy, genial influence,
Coming one knows not how nor whence,
Nor whither going.

. . . . . .

"If stately passions in me burn,
And one chance look to thee should turn,
I drink out of an humbler urn,
A lowlier pleasure;
The homely sympathy that heeds
The common life our nature breeds;
A wisdom fitted to the needs
Of hearts at leisure."[1]

[1] Wordsworth: "To the Daisy".

THE FIRST EDINBURGH REVIEWERS.[1]

(1855.)

It is odd to hear that the *Edinburgh Review* was once thought an incendiary publication. A young generation, which has always regarded the appearance of that periodical as a grave constitutional event (and been told that its composition is entrusted to Privy Councillors only), can scarcely believe, that once grave gentlemen kicked it out of doors—that the dignified classes murmured at "those young men" starting such views, abetting such tendencies, using *such* expressions—that aged men said: "Very clever, but not at all sound". Venerable men, too, exaggerate. People say the *Review* was planned in a garret, but this is incredible. Merely to take such a work into a garret would be inconsistent with propriety; and the tale that the original conception, the pure idea to which each number is a quarterly aspiration, ever was in a garret is the evident fiction of reminiscent ages—striving and failing to remember.

[1] *A Memoir of the Rev. Sydney Smith.* By his daughter, Lady Holland. With a Selection from his Letters. Edited by Mrs. Austin. 2 vols. Longmans.

Lord Jeffrey's Contributions to the "Edinburgh Review". A new Edition in one volume. Longmans.

Lord Brougham's Collected Works, vols. i., ii., iii. *Lives of Philosophers of the Reign of George III. Lives of Men of Letters of the Reign of George III. Historical Sketches of the Statesmen who flourished in the Reign of George III.* Griffin.

The Rev. Sydney Smith's Miscellaneous Works. Including his Contributions to the "Edinburgh Review". Longmans.

Review writing is one of the features of modern literature. Many able men really give themselves up to it. Comments on ancient writings are scarcely so common as formerly; no great part of our literary talent is devoted to the illustration of the ancient masters; but what seems at first sight less dignified, annotation on modern writings was never so frequent. Hazlitt started the question, whether it would not be as well to review works which did not appear, in lieu of those which did—wishing, as a reviewer, to escape the labour of perusing print, and, as a man, to save his fellow-creatures from the slow torture of tedious extracts. But, though approximations may frequently be noticed—though the neglect of authors and independence of critics are on the increase—this conception, in its grandeur, has never been carried out. We are surprised at first sight, that writers should wish to comment on one another; it appears a tedious mode of stating opinions, and a needless confusion of personal facts with abstract arguments; and some, especially authors who have been censured, say that the cause is laziness—that it is easier to write a review than a book—and that reviewers are, as Coleridge declared, a species of maggots, inferior to bookworms, living on the delicious brains of real genius. Indeed, it *would* be very nice, but our world is so imperfect. This idea is wholly false. Doubtless it is easier to write one review than one book: but not, which is the real case, many reviews than one book. A deeper cause must be looked for.

In truth, review writing but exemplifies the casual character of modern literature. Everything about it is temporary and fragmentary. Look at a railway stall; you see books of every colour—blue, yellow, crimson, "ring-streaked, speckled, and spotted," on every subject, in every style, of every opinion, with every conceivable difference, celestial or sublunary, maleficent, beneficent—but all small.

People take their literature in morsels, as they take sandwiches on a journey. The volumes, at least, you can see clearly, are not intended to be everlasting. It may be all very well for a pure essence like poetry to be immortal in a perishable world; it has no feeling; but paper cannot endure it, paste cannot bear it, string has no heart for it. The race has made up its mind to be fugitive, as well as minute. What a change from the ancient volume!—

> "That weight of wood, with leathern coat o'erlaid,
> These ample clasps, of solid metal made;
> The close-press'd leaves, unoped for many an age,
> The dull red edging of the well-fill'd page;
> On the broad back the stubborn ridges roll'd,
> Where yet the title stands in tarnish'd gold".[1]

And the change in the appearance of books has been accompanied—has been caused—by a similar change in readers. What a transition from the student of former ages!—from a grave man, with grave cheeks and a considerate eye, who spends his life in study, has no interest in the outward world, hears nothing of its din, and cares nothing for its honours, who would gladly learn and gladly teach, whose whole soul is taken up with a few books of "Aristotle and his Philosophy,"—to the merchant in the railway, with a head full of sums, an idea that tallow is "up," a conviction that teas are "lively," and a mind reverting perpetually from the little volume which he reads to these mundane topics, to the railway, to the shares, to the buying and bargaining universe. We must not wonder that the outside of books is so different, when the inner nature of those for whom they are written is so changed.

It is indeed a peculiarity of our times, that we must instruct so many persons. On politics, on religion, on all

[1] Crabbe: "The Library".

less important topics still more, every one thinks himself competent to think,—in some casual manner does think,—to the best of our means must be taught to think—rightly. Even if we had a profound and far-seeing statesman, his deep ideas and long-reaching vision would be useless to us, unless we could impart a confidence in them to the mass of influential persons, to the unelected Commons, the unchosen Council, who assist at the deliberations of the nation. In religion the appeal now is not to the technicalities of scholars, or the fiction of recluse schoolmen, but to the deep feelings, the sure sentiments, the painful strivings of all who think and hope. And this appeal to the many necessarily brings with it a consequence. We must speak to the many so that they will listen—that they will like to listen—that they will understand. It is of no use addressing them with the forms of science, or the rigour of accuracy, or the tedium of exhaustive discussion. The multitude are impatient of system, desirous of brevity, puzzled by formality. They agree with Sydney Smith: "Political economy has become, in the hands of Malthus and Ricardo, a school of metaphysics. All seem agreed what is to be done; the contention is, how the subject is to be divided and defined. *Meddle with no such matters.*" We are not sneering at "the last of the sciences"; we are concerned with the essential doctrine, and not with the particular instance. Such is the taste of mankind.

We may repeat ourselves.

There is, as yet, no Act of Parliament compelling a *bonâ fide* traveller to read. If you wish him to read, you must make reading pleasant. You must give him short views, and clear sentences. It will not answer to explain what all the things which you describe are *not*. You must begin by saying what they are. There is exactly the difference between the books of this age, and those of a more laborious age, that we feel between the lecture of a professor and the talk of the

man of the world—the former profound, systematic, suggesting all arguments, analysing all difficulties, discussing all doubts,—very admirable, a little tedious, slowly winding an elaborate way, the characteristic effort of one who has hived wisdom during many studious years, agreeable to such as he is, anything but agreeable to such as he is not: the latter, the talk of the manifold talker, glancing lightly from topic to topic, suggesting deep things in a jest, unfolding unanswerable arguments in an absurd illustration, expounding nothing, completing nothing, exhausting nothing, yet really suggesting the lessons of a wider experience, embodying the results of a more finely tested philosophy, passing with a more Shakespearian transition, connecting topics with a more subtle link, refining on them with an acuter perception, and what is more to the purpose, pleasing all that hear him, charming high and low, in season and out of season, with a word of illustration for each and a touch of humour intelligible to all,—fragmentary yet imparting what he says, allusive yet explaining what he intends, disconnected yet impressing what he maintains. This is the very model of our modern writing. The man of the modern world is used to speak what the modern world will hear; the writer of the modern world must write what that world will indulgently and pleasantly peruse.

In this transition from ancient writing to modern, the review-like essay and the essay-like review fill a large space. Their small bulk, their slight pretension to systematic completeness, their avowal, it might be said, of necessary incompleteness, the facility of changing the subject, of selecting points to attack, of exposing only the best corner for defence, are great temptations. Still greater is the advantage of "our limits". A real reviewer always spends his first and best pages on the parts of a subject on which he wishes to write, the easy comfortable parts which he knows. The formidable

difficulties which he acknowledges, you foresee by a strange fatality that he will only reach two pages before the end; to his great grief there is no opportunity for discussing them. As a young gentleman, at the India House examination, wrote "Time up" on nine unfinished papers in succession, so you may occasionally read a whole review, in every article of which the principal difficulty of each successive question is about to be reached at the conclusion. Nor can any one deny that this is the suitable skill, the judicious custom of the craft.

Some may be inclined to mourn over the old days of systematic arguments and regular discussion. A "field-day" controversy is a fine thing. These skirmishes have much danger and no glory. Yet there is one immense advantage. The appeal now is to the mass of sensible persons. Professed students are not generally suspected of common-sense; and though they often show acuteness in their peculiar pursuits, they have not the various experience, the changing imagination, the feeling nature, the realised detail which are necessary data for a thousand questions. Whatever we may think on this point, however, the transition has been made. The *Edinburgh Review* was, at its beginning, a material step in the change. Unquestionably, the *Spectator* and *Tatler*, and such-like writings, had opened a similar vein, but their size was too small. They could only deal with small fragments, or the extreme essence of a subject. They could not give a view of what was complicated, or analyse what was involved. The modern man must be told what to think—shortly, no doubt—but he *must* be told it. The essay-like criticism of modern times is about the length which he likes. The *Edinburgh Review*, which began the system, may be said to be, in this country, the commencement on large topics of suitable views for sensible persons.

The circumstances of the time were especially favourable

to such an undertaking. Those years were the commencement of what is called the Eldonine period. The cold and haughty Pitt had gone down to the grave in circumstances singularly contrasting with his prosperous youth, and he had carried along with him the inner essence of half-liberal principle, which had clung to a tenacious mind from youthful associations, and was all that remained to the Tories of abstraction or theory. As for Lord Eldon, it is the most difficult thing in the world to believe that there ever was such a man. It only shows how intense historical evidence is, that no one really doubts it. He believed in everything which it is impossible to believe in—in the danger of Parliamentary Reform, the danger of Catholic Emancipation, the danger of altering the Court of Chancery, the danger of altering the Courts of Law, the danger of abolishing capital punishment for trivial thefts, the danger of making landowners pay their debts, the danger of making anything more, the danger of making anything less. It seems as if he maturely thought: "Now I know the present state of things to be consistent with the existence of John Lord Eldon; but if we begin altering that state, I am sure I do not know that it will be consistent". As Sir Robert Walpole was against all committees of inquiry on the simple ground, "If they once begin that sort of thing, who knows who will be safe?"—so that great Chancellor (still remembered in his own scene) looked pleasantly down from the woolsack, and seemed to observe: "Well, it *is* a queer thing that I should be here, and here I mean to stay". With this idea he employed, for many years, all the abstract intellect of an accomplished lawyer, all the practical *bonhomie* of an accomplished courtier, all the energy of both professions, all the subtlety acquired in either, in the task of maintaining John Lord Eldon in the Cabinet, and maintaining a Cabinet that would suit John Lord Eldon. No matter what change or misfortunes happened to the Royal house,—whether the

most important person in court politics was the old King or the young King, Queen Charlotte or Queen Caroline—whether it was a question of talking grave business to the mutton of George III., or queer stories beside the champagne of George IV., there was the same figure. To the first he was tearfully conscientious, and at the second the old northern circuit stories (how old, what outlasting tradition shall ever say ?) told with a cheerful *bonhomie*, and a strong conviction that they *were* ludicrous, really seem to have pleased as well as the more artificial niceties of the professed wits. He was always agreeable, and always serviceable. No little peccadillo offended him : the ideal, according to the satirist, of a "good-natured man," [1] he cared for nothing until he was himself hurt. He ever remembered the statute which absolves obedience to a king *de facto*. And it was the same in the political world. There was one man who never changed. No matter what politicians came and went—and a good many, including several that are now scarcely remembered, did come and go—the "Cabinet-maker," as men called him, still remained. "As to Lord Liverpool being Prime Minister," continued Mr. Brougham, "he is no more Prime Minister than I am. I reckon Lord Liverpool as a sort of member of opposition ; and after what has recently passed, if I were required, I should designate him as 'a noble lord with whom I have the honour to act'. Lord Liverpool may have collateral influence, but Lord Eldon has all the direct influence of the Prime Minister. He is Prime Minister to all intents and purposes, and he stands alone in the full exercise of all the influence of that high situation. Lord Liverpool has carried measures against the Lord Chancellor ; so have I. If Lord Liverpool carried the Marriage Act, I carried the Education Bill," etc., etc. And though the general views of Lord Eldon may be

[1] Hazlitt on Eldon in the "Spirit of the Age".

described—though one can say at least negatively and intelligibly that he objected to everything proposed, and never proposed anything himself—the arguments are such as it would require great intellectual courage to endeavour at all to explain. What follows is a favourable specimen. "Lord Grey," says his biographer,[1] "having introduced a bill for dispensing with the declarations prescribed by the Acts of 25 and 30 Car. II., against the doctrine of Transubstantiation and the Invocation of Saints, moved the second reading of it on the 10th of June, when the Lord Chancellor again opposed the principle of such a measure, urging that the law which had been introduced under Charles II. had been re-enacted in the first Parliament of *William III.*, the founder of our civil and religious liberties. It had been thought necessary for the preservation of these, that *Papists* should not be allowed to sit in Parliament, and some test was necessary by which it might be ascertained whether a man was a Catholic or Protestant. The only possible test for such a purpose was an oath declaratory of religious belief, and, as *Dr. Paley* had observed, it was perfectly just to have a religious test of a political creed. He entreated the House not to commit the crime against posterity of transmitting to them in an impaired and insecure state the civil and religious liberties of England." And this sort of appeal to Paley and King William is made the ground—one can hardly say the reason—for the most rigid adherence to all that was established.

It may be asked: How came the English people to endure this? They are not naturally illiberal; on the contrary, though slow and cautious, they are prone to steady improvement, and not at all disposed to acquiesce in the unlimited perfection of their rulers. On a certain imaginative side, unquestionably, there is or was a strong feeling of loyalty, of

[1] Twiss.

attachment to what is old, love for what is ancestral, belief in what has been tried. But the fond attachment to the past is a very different idea from a slavish adoration of the present. Nothing is more removed from the Eldonine idolatry of the *status quo* than the old cavalier feeling of deep idolatry for the ancient realm—that half-mystic idea that consecrated what it touched; the moonlight, as it were, which—

> "Silver'd the walls of Cumnor Hall,
> And many an oak that grew thereby".[1]

Why, then, did the English endure the everlasting Chancellor?

The fact is, that Lord Eldon's rule was maintained a great deal on the same motives as that of Louis Napoleon. One can fancy his astonishment at hearing it said, and his cheerful rejoinder: "That whatever he was, and Mr. Brougham was in the habit of calling him strange names, no one should ever make him believe that he was a *Bonaparte*". But, in fact, he was, like the present Emperor, the head of what we call the party of order. Everybody knows what keeps Louis Napoleon in his place. It is not attachment to him, but dread of what he restrains—dread of revolution. The present may not be good, and having such newspapers—you might say no newspapers—is dreadful; but it is better than no trade, bankrupt banks, loss of old savings; your mother beheaded on destructive principles; your eldest son shot on conservative ones. Very similar was the feeling of Englishmen in the year 1800. They had no liking at all for the French system. Statesmen saw its absurdity, holy men were shocked at its impiety, mercantile men saw its effect on the five per cents. Everybody was revolted by its cruelty. That it came across the Channel was no great recommenda-

[1] Introduction to "Kenilworth," from Evans's *Old Ballads*. (Forrest Morgan.)

tion. A witty writer of our own time says, that if a still Mussulman, in his flowing robes, wished to give his son a warning against renouncing his faith, he would take the completest, smartest, dapperest French dandy out of the streets of Pera, and say: "There, my son, if ever you come to forget God and the Prophet, you may come to look like *that*". Exactly similar in old conservative speeches is the use of the French Revolution. If you proposed to alter anything, of importance or not of importance, legal or social, religious or not religious, the same answer was ready: "You see what the French have come to. They made alterations; if we make alterations, who knows but we may end in the same way?" It was not any peculiar bigotry in Lord Eldon that actuated him, or he would have been powerless; still less was it any affected feeling which he put forward (though, doubtless, he was aware of its persuasive potency, and worked on it most skilfully to his own ends); it was genuine, hearty, craven fear; and he ruled naturally the commonplace Englishman, because he sympathised in his sentiments, and excelled him in his powers.

There was, too, another cause beside fear which then inclined, and which in similar times of miscellaneous revolution will ever incline, subtle rather than creative intellects to a narrow conservatism. Such intellects require an exact creed; they want to be able clearly to distinguish themselves from those around them; to tell to each man where they differ, and why they differ; they cannot make assumptions; they cannot, like the merely practical man, be content with rough and obvious axioms; they require a *theory*. Such a want it is difficult to satisfy in an age of confusion and tumult, when old habits are shaken, old views overthrown, ancient assumptions rudely questioned, ancient inferences utterly denied, when each man has a different view from his neighbour, when an intellectual change has set father and son at

variance, when a man's own household are the special foes of his favourite and self-adopted creed. A bold and original mind breaks through these vexations, and forms for itself a theory satisfactory to its notions, and sufficient for its wants. A weak mind yields a passive obedience to those among whom it is thrown. But a mind which is searching without being creative, which is accurate and logical enough to see defects, without being combinative or inventive enough to provide remedies—which, in the old language, is discriminative rather than discursive—is wholly unable, out of the medley of new suggestions, to provide itself with an adequate belief; and it naturally falls back on the *status quo.* This is, at least, clear and simple and defined; you know at any rate what you propose—where you end—why you pause;—an argumentative defence it is, doubtless, difficult to find; but there are arguments on all sides; the world is a medley of arguments; no one is agreed in which direction to alter the world; what is proposed is as liable to objection as what exists; nonsense for nonsense, the old should keep its ground: and so in times of convulsion, the philosophic scepticism—the ever-questioning hesitation of Hume and Montaigne—the subtlest quintessence of the most restless and refining abstraction—becomes allied to the stupidest, crudest acquiescence in the present and concrete world. We read occasionally in conservative literature (the remark is as true of religion as of politics) alternations of sentences, the first an appeal to the coarsest prejudice,—the next a subtle hint to a craving and insatiable scepticism. You may trace this even in Vesey junior. Lord Eldon never read Hume or Montaigne, but sometimes, in the interstices of cumbrous law, you may find sentences with their meaning, if not in their manner; "Dumpor's case always struck me as extraordinary; but if you depart from Dumpor's case, what is there to prevent a departure in every direction?"

The glory of the *Edinburgh Review* is that from the first it steadily set itself to oppose this timorous acquiescence in the actual system. On domestic subjects the history of the first thirty years of the nineteenth century is a species of duel between the *Edinburgh Review* and Lord Eldon. All the ancient abuses which he thought it most dangerous to impair, they thought it most dangerous to retain. "To appreciate the value of the *Edinburgh Review*," says one of the founders,[1] "the state of England at the period when that journal began should be had in remembrance. The Catholics were not emancipated. The Corporation and Test Acts were unrepealed. The game-laws were horribly oppressive; steel-traps and spring-guns were set all over the country; prisoners tried for their lives could have no counsel. Lord Eldon and the Court of Chancery pressed heavily on mankind. Libel was punished by the most cruel and vindictive imprisonments. The principles of political economy were little understood. The laws of debt and conspiracy were on the worst footing. The enormous wickedness of the slave-trade was tolerated. A thousand evils were in existence which the talents of good and noble men have since lessened or removed: and these efforts have been not a little assisted by the honest boldness of the *Edinburgh Review*." And even more characteristic than the advocacy of these or any other partial or particular reforms is the systematic opposition of the *Edinburgh Review* to the crude acquiescence in the *status quo;* the timorous dislike to change because it was change; to the optimistic conclusion, "that what is, ought to be"; the sceptical query: "How do you know that what you say will be any better?"

In this defence of the principle of innovation, a defence which it requires great imagination (or, as we suggested, the looking across the Channel) to conceive the efficacy of now,

[1] Sydney Smith.

the *Edinburgh Review* was but the doctrinal organ of the Whigs. A great deal of philosophy has been expended in endeavouring to fix and express theoretically the creed of that party: various forms of abstract doctrine have been drawn out, in which elaborate sentence follows hard on elaborate sentence, to be set aside, or at least vigorously questioned by the next or succeeding inquirers. In truth Whiggism is not a creed, it is a character. Perhaps as long as there has been a political history in this country there have been certain men of a cool, moderate, resolute firmness, not gifted with high imagination, little prone to enthusiastic sentiment, heedless of large theories and speculations, careless of dreamy scepticism; with a clear view of the next step, and a wise intention to take it; a strong conviction that the elements of knowledge are true, and a steady belief that the present world can, and should be, quietly improved.

These are the Whigs. A tinge of simplicity still clings to the character; of old it was the Country Party. The limitation of their imagination is in some sort an advantage to such men; it confines them to a simple path, prevents their being drawn aside by various speculations, restricts them to what is clear and intelligible, and at hand. "I cannot," said Sir S. Romilly, "be convinced without arguments, and I do not see that either Burke or Paine advance any." He was unable to see that the most convincing arguments—and some of those in the work of Burke which he alludes to,[1] are certainly sound enough—may be expressed imaginatively, and may work a far firmer persuasion than any neat and abstract statement. Nor are the intellectual powers of the characteristic element in this party exactly of the loftiest order; they have no call to make great discoveries, or pursue unbounded designs, or amaze the world

[1] *Reflections upon the Revolution in France.*

by some wild dream of empire and renown. That terrible essence of daring genius, such as we see it in Napoleon, and can imagine it in some of the conquerors of old time, is utterly removed from their cool and placid judgment. In taste they are correct,—that is, better appreciating the complete compliance with explicit and ascertained rules, than the unconscious exuberance of inexplicable and unforeseen beauties. In their own writings, they display the defined neatness of the second order, rather than the aspiring hardihood of the first excellence. In action they are quiet and reasonable rather than inventive and overwhelming. Their power, indeed, is scarcely intellectual; on the contrary, it resides in what Aristotle would have called their ἦθος, and we should call their nature. They are emphatically pure-natured and firm-natured. Instinctively casting aside the coarse temptations and crude excitements of a vulgar earth, they pass like a September breeze across the other air, cool and refreshing, unable, one might fancy, even to comprehend the many offences with which all else is fainting and oppressed. So far even as their excellence is intellectual, it consists less in the supereminent possession of any single talent or endowment, than in the simultaneous enjoyment and felicitous adjustment of many or several;—in a certain balance of the faculties which we call judgment or sense, which placidly indicates to them what should be done, and which is not preserved without an equable calm, and a patient, persistent watchfulness. In such men the moral and intellectual nature half become one. Whether, according to the Greek question, manly virtue can be taught or not, assuredly it has never been taught to them; it seems a native endowment; it seems a soul—a soul of honour—as we speak, within the exterior soul; a fine impalpable essence, more exquisite than the rest of the being; as the thin pillar of the cloud, more beautiful than the other blue of heaven,

governing and guiding a simple way through the dark wilderness of our world.

To descend from such elevations, among *people* Sir Samuel Romilly is the best-known type of this character. The admirable biography of him made public his admirable virtues. Yet it is probable that among the aristocratic Whigs, persons as typical of the character can be found. This species of noble nature is exactly of the kind which hereditary associations tend to purify and confirm; just that casual, delicate, placid virtue, which it is so hard to find, perhaps so sanguine to expect, in a rough tribune of the people. Defects enough there are in this character, on which we shall say something; yet it is wonderful to see what an influence in this sublunary sphere it gains and preserves. The world makes an oracle of its judgment. There is a curious living instance of this. You may observe that when an ancient liberal, Lord John Russell, or any of the essential sect, has done anything very queer, the last thing you would imagine anybody would dream of doing, and is attacked for it, he always answers boldly, "Lord Lansdowne said I *might*"; or if it is a ponderous day, the eloquence runs, "A noble friend with whom I have ever had the inestimable advantage of being associated from the commencement (the infantile period, I might say) of my political life, and to whose advice," etc., etc., etc.—and a very cheerful existence it must be for "my noble friend" to be expected to justify—(for they never say it except they have done something very odd)—and dignify every aberration. Still it must be a beautiful feeling to have a man like Lord John, to have a stiff, small man bowing down before you. And a good judge[1] certainly suggested the conferring of this authority. "Why do they not talk over the virtues and excellences of Lansdowne? There is no man who performs the duties of life better, or

[1] Sydney Smith.

fills a high station in a more becoming manner. He is full of knowledge, and eager for its acquisition. His remarkable politeness is the result of good nature, regulated by good sense. He looks for talents and qualities among all ranks of men, and adds them to his stock of society, as a botanist does his plants; and while other aristocrats are yawning among stars and garters, Lansdowne is refreshing his soul with the fancy and genius which he has found in odd places, and gathered to the marbles and pictures of his palace. Then he is an honest politician, a wise statesman, and has a philosophic mind," etc., etc.[1] Here is devotion for a carping critic; and who ever heard before of *bonhomie* in an idol?

It may strike some that this equable kind of character is not the most interesting. Many will prefer the bold felicities of daring genius, the deep plans of latent and searching sagacity, the hardy triumphs of an overawing and imperious will. Yet it is not unremarkable that an experienced and erudite Frenchman, not unalive to artistic effect, has just now selected this very species of character for the main figure in a large portion of an elaborate work. The hero of M. Villemain is one to whom he delights to ascribe such things as *bon sens*, *esprit juste*, *cœur excellent*. The result, it may be owned, is a little dull, yet it is not the less characteristic. The instructed observer has detected the deficiency of his country. If France had more men of firm will, quiet composure, with a suspicion of enormous principle and a taste for moderate improvement: if a Whig party, in a word, were possible in France, France would be free. And though there are doubtless crises in affairs, dark and terrible moments, when a more creative intellect is needful to propose, a more dictatorial will is necessary to carry out, a

[1] Sydney Smith, Letter to John Murray, June 4, 1843; "Memoir," vol. ii.

sudden and daring resolution; though in times of inextricable confusion—perhaps the present is one of them[1]—a more abstruse and disentangling intellect is required to untwist the ravelled perplexities of a complicated world; yet England will cease to be the England of our fathers, when a large share in great affairs is no longer given to the equable sense, the composed resolution, the homely purity of the characteristic Whigs.

It is evident that between such men and Lord Eldon there could be no peace; and between them and the *Edinburgh Review* there was a natural alliance. Not only the kind of reforms there proposed, the species of views therein maintained, but the very manner in which those views and alterations are put forward and maintained, is just what they would like. The kind of writing suitable to such minds is not the elaborate, ambitious, exhaustive discussion of former ages, but the clear, simple, occasional writing (as we just now described it) of the present times. The opinions to be expressed are short and simple; the innovations suggested are natural and evident; neither one nor the other require more than an intelligible statement, a distinct exposition to the world; and their reception would be only impeded and complicated by operose and cumbrous argumentation. The exact mind which of all others dislikes the stupid adherence to the *status quo*, is the keen, quiet, improving Whig mind; the exact kind of writing most adapted to express that dislike is the cool, pungent, didactic essay.

Equally common to the Whigs and the *Edinburgh Review* is the enmity to the sceptical, over-refining Toryism of Hume and Montaigne. The Whigs, it is true, have a conservatism of their own, but it instinctively clings to certain practical rules tried by steady adherence, to appropriate formulæ verified by the regular application and steady

[1] This was published in October, 1855.

success of many ages. Political philosophers speak of it as a great step when the idea of an attachment to an organised code and system of rules and laws takes the place of the exclusive oriental attachment to the person of the single monarch. This step is natural, is instinctive to the Whig mind; that cool impassive intelligence is little likely to yield to ardent emotions of personal loyalty; but its chosen ideal is a body or collection of wise rules fitly applicable to great affairs, pleasing a placid sense by an evident propriety, gratifying the capacity for business by a constant and clear applicability. The Whigs are constitutional by instinct, as the Cavaliers were monarchical by devotion. It has been a jest at their present leader[1] that he is over familiar with public forms and parliamentary rites. The first wish of the Whigs is to retain the constitution; the second—and it is of almost equal strength—is to improve it. They think the body of laws now existing to be, in the main and in its essence, excellent; but yet that there are exceptional defects which should be remedied, superficial inconsistencies that should be corrected. The most opposite creed is that of the sceptic, who teaches that you are to keep what is because it exists; not from a conviction of its excellence, but from an uncertainty that anything better can be obtained. The one is an attachment to precise rules for specific reasons; the other an acquiescence in the present on grounds that would be equally applicable to its very opposite, from a disbelief in the possibility of improvement, and a conviction of the uncertainty of all things. And equally adverse to an unlimited scepticism is the nature of popular writing. It is true that the greatest teachers of that creed have sometimes, and as it were of set purpose, adopted that species of writing; yet essentially it is inimical to them. Its appeal is to the people; as has been shown, it addresses the *élite* of common

[1] Lord Palmerston.

men, sensible in their affairs, intelligent in their tastes, influential among their neighbours. What is absolute scepticism to such men?—a dream, a chimera, an inexplicable absurdity. Tell it to them to-day, and they will have forgotten it to-morrow. A man of business hates elaborate trifling. "If you do not believe *your own* senses," he will say, "there is no use in *my* talking to you." As to the multiplicity of arguments and the complexity of questions, he feels them little. He has a plain, simple, as he would say, practical way of looking at the matter; and you will never make him comprehend any other. He knows the world *can* be improved. And thus what we may call the middle species of writing—which is intermediate between the light, frivolous style of merely amusing literature, and the heavy, conscientious elaborateness of methodical philosophy—the style of the original *Edinburgh*—is, in truth, as opposed to the vague, desponding conservatism of the sceptic as it is to the stupid conservatism of the crude and uninstructed; and substantially for the same reason—that it is addressed to men of cool, clear, and practical understandings.

It is, indeed, no wonder that the *Edinburgh Review* should be agreeable to the Whigs, for the people who founded it were Whigs. Among these, three stand pre-eminent—Horner, Jeffrey, and Sydney Smith. Other men of equal ability may have contributed—and a few did contribute—to its pages; but these men were, more than any one else, the first *Edinburgh Review*.

Francis Horner's was a short and singular life. He was the son of an Edinburgh shopkeeper. He died at thirty-nine; and when he died, from all sides of the usually cold House of Commons great statesmen and thorough gentlemen got up to deplore his loss. Tears are rarely parliamentary: all men are arid towards young Scotchmen; yet it was one

of that inclement nation whom statesmen of the species Castlereagh, and statesmen of the species Whitbread—with all the many kinds and species that lie between the two—rose in succession to lament. The fortunes and superficial aspect of the man make it more singular. He had no wealth, was a briefless barrister, never held an office, was a conspicuous member of the most unpopular of all oppositions—the opposition to a glorious and successful war. He never had the means of obliging any one. He was destitute of showy abilities: he had not the intense eloquence or overwhelming ardour which enthral and captivate popular assemblies: his powers of administration were little tried, and may possibly be slightly questioned. In his youthful reading he was remarkable for laying down, for a few months of study, enormous plans, such as many years would scarcely complete; and not especially remarkable for doing anything wonderful towards accomplishing those plans. Sir Walter Scott, who, though not illiberal in his essential intellect, was a keen partisan on superficial matters, and no lenient critic on actual Edinburgh Whigs, used to observe: "I cannot admire your Horner; he always reminds me of Obadiah's bull, who, though he never certainly did produce a calf, nevertheless went about his business with so much gravity, that he commanded the respect of the whole parish".[1] It is no explanation of the universal regret, that he was a considerable political economist: no real English gentleman, in his secret soul, was ever sorry for the death of a political economist: he is much more likely to be sorry for his life. There is an idea that he has something to do with statistics; or, if that be exploded, that he is a person who writes upon "value": says that rent is—you cannot very well make out what; talks excruciating currency; he may be useful as

[1] See last chapter of "Tristram Shandy".

drying machines are useful ;[1] but the notion of crying about him is absurd. The economical loss might be great, but it will not explain the mourning for Francis Horner.

The fact is that Horner is a striking example of the advantage of keeping an atmosphere. This may sound like nonsense, and yet it is true. There is around some men a kind of circle or halo of influences, and traits, and associations, by which they infallibly leave a distinct and uniform impression on all their contemporaries. It is very difficult, even for those who have the best opportunities, to analyse exactly what this impression consists in, or why it was made —but it *is* made. There is a certain undefinable keeping in the traits and manner, and common speech and characteristic actions of some men, which inevitably stamps the same mark and image. It is like a man's style. There are some writers who can be known by a few words of their writing ; each syllable is instinct with a certain spirit : put it into the hands of any one chosen at random, the same impression will be produced by the same casual and felicitous means. Just so in character, the air and atmosphere, so to speak, which are around a man, have a delicate and expressive power, and leave a stamp of unity on the interpretative faculty of mankind. Death dissolves this association, and it becomes a problem for posterity what it was that contemporaries observed and reverenced. There is Lord Somers. Does any one know why he had such a reputation ? He was Lord Chancellor, and decided a Bank case, and had an influence in the Cabinet ; but there have been Lord Chancellors, and Bank cases, and influential Cabinet ministers not a few, that have never attained to a like reputation.

[1] "Horner is ill. He was desired to read amusing books : upon searching his library, it appeared he had no amusing books ; the nearest approach to a work of that description being the *Indian Trader's Complete Guide.*"—*Sydney Smith's Letter to Lady Holland.*

There is little we can connect specifically with his name. Lord Macaulay, indeed, says that he spoke for five minutes on the Bishops' trial; and that when he sat down, his reputation as an orator and constitutional lawyer was established. But this must be a trifle eloquent; hardly any orator could be fast enough to attain such a reputation in five minutes. The truth is, that Lord Somers had around him that inexpressible attraction and influence of which we speak. He left a sure, and if we may trust the historian, even a momentary impression on those who saw him. By a species of tact they felt him to be a great man. The ethical sense —for there is almost such a thing in simple persons—discriminated the fine and placid oneness of his nature. It was the same on a smaller scale with Horner. After he had left Edinburgh several years, his closest and most confidential associate writes to him: "There is no circumstance in your life, my dear Horner, so enviable as the universal confidence which your conduct has produced among all descriptions of men. I do not speak of your friends, who have been near and close observers; but I have had some occasions of observing the impression which those who are distant spectators have had, and I believe there are few instances of any person of your age possessing the same character for independence and integrity, qualities for which very little credit is given in general to young men."[1] Sydney Smith said, "the Ten Commandments were written on his countenance". Of course he was a very ugly man, but the moral impression in fact conveyed was equally efficacious. "I have often," said the same most just observer, "told him, that there was not a crime he might not commit with impunity, as no judge or jury who saw him would give the smallest credit to any evidence against him. There was in his look a calm settled love of all that was honourable and

[1] Letter from Lord Murray.

good—an air of wisdom and of sweetness. You saw at once that he was a great man, whom Nature had intended for a leader of human beings; you ranged yourself willingly under his banners, and cheerfully submitted to his sway." From the somewhat lengthened description of what we defined as the essential Whig character, it is evident how agreeable and suitable such a man was to their quiet, composed, and aristocratic nature. His tone was agreeable to English gentlemen: a firm and placid manliness, without effort or pretension, is what they like best; and therefore it was that the House of Commons grieved for his loss—unanimously and without distinction.

Some friends of Horner's, in his own time, mildly criticised him for a tendency to party spirit. The disease in him, if real, was by no means virulent; but it is worth noticing as one of the defects to which the proper Whig character is specially prone. It is evident in the quiet agreement of the men. Their composed, unimaginative nature is inclined to isolate itself in a single view; their placid disposition, never prone to self-distrust, is rather susceptible of friendly influence; their practical habit is concentrated on what should be done. They do not wish—they do not like to go forth into various speculation; to put themselves in the position of opponents; to weigh in a refining scale the special weight of small objections. Their fancy is hardly vivid enough to explain to them all the characters of those whom they oppose; their intellect scarcely detective enough to discover a meaning for each grain in opposing arguments. Nor is their temper, it may be, always prone to be patient with propositions which tease, and persons who resist them. The wish to call down fire from heaven is rarely absent in pure zeal for a pure cause.

A good deal of praise has naturally been bestowed upon the Whigs for adopting such a man as Horner, with Romilly

and others of that time; and much excellent eulogy has been expended on the close boroughs, which afforded to the Whig leaders a useful mode of showing their favour. Certainly, the character of Horner was one altogether calculated to ingratiate itself with the best and most special Whig nature. But as for the eulogy on the proprietary seats in Parliament, it is certain that from the position of the Whig party, the nomination system was then most likely to show its excellences, and to conceal its defects. Nobody but an honest man would bind himself thoroughly to the Whigs. It was evident that the reign of Lord Eldon must be long; the heavy and common Englishman (after all, the most steady and powerful force in our political constitution) had been told that Lord Grey was in favour of the "Papists," and liked Bonaparte; and the consequence was a long, painful, arduous exile on "the other side of the table,"—the last place any political adventurer would wish to arrive at. Those who have no bribes will never charm the corrupt; those who have nothing to give will not please those who desire that much shall be given them. There is an observation of Niel Blane, the innkeeper, in *Old Mortality*. "'And what are we to eat ourselves, then, father,' asked Jenny, 'when we hae sent awa the haile meal in the ark and the girnel?' 'We maun gaur wheat flour serve us for a blink,' said Niel, with an air of resignation. 'It is not that ill food, though far frae being sae hearty and kindly to a Scotchman's stomach as the curney aitmeal is: the Englishers live amaist upon it,'" etc. It was so with the Whigs; they were obliged to put up with honest and virtuous men, and they wanted able men to carry on a keen opposition; and, after all, they and the "Englishers" like such men best.

In another point of view, too, Horner's life was characteristic of those times. It might seem, at first sight, odd that the English Whigs should go to Scotland to find a

literary representative. There was no place where Toryism was so intense. The constitution of Scotland at that time has been described as the worst constitution in Europe. The nature of the representation made the entire country a Government borough. In the towns, the franchise belonged to a close and self-electing corporation, who were always carefully watched: the county representation, anciently resting on a property qualification, had become vested in a few titular freeholders, something like lords of the manor, only that they might have no manor; and these, even with the addition of the borough freeholders, did not amount to three thousand. The whole were in the hands of Lord Eldon's party, and the entire force, influence, and patronage of Government were spent to maintain and keep it so. By inevitable consequence, Liberalism, even of the most moderate kind, was thought almost a criminal offence. The mild Horner was considered a man of "very violent opinions".[1] Jeffrey's father, a careful and discerning parent, was so anxious to shield him from the intellectual taint, as to forbid his attendance at Stewart's lectures. This seems an odd place to find the eruption of a liberal review. Of course the necessary effect of a close and commonplace tyranny was to engender a strong reaction in searching and vigorous minds. The Liberals of the North, though far fewer, may perhaps have been stronger Liberals than those of the South; but this will hardly explain the phenomenon. The reason is an academical one; the teaching of Scotland seems to have been designed to teach men to write essays and articles. There are two kinds of education, into all the details of which it is not now pleasant to go, but which may be adequately described as the education of facts, and the education of speculation. The system of facts is the English system. The strength of the pedagogue and the agony of

[1] Lady Holland: *Memoirs of Sydney Smith.*

the pupil are designed to engender a good knowledge of two languages; in the old times, a little arithmetic; now, also a knowledge, more or less, of mathematics and mathematical physics. The positive tastes and tendencies of the English mind confine its training to ascertained learning and definite science. In Scotland the case has long been different. The time of a man like Horner was taken up with speculations like these: "I have long been feeding my ambition with the prospect of accomplishing, at some future period of my life, a work similar to that which Sir Francis Bacon executed, about two hundred years ago. It will depend on the sweep and turn of my speculations, whether they shall be thrown into the form of a discursive commentary on the *Instauratio Magna* of that great author, or shall be entitled to an original form, under the title of a 'View of the Limits of Human Knowledge and a System of the Principles of Philosophical Inquiry'. I shall say nothing at present of the audacity," etc., etc. And this sort of planning, which is the staple of his youthful biography, was really accompanied by much application to metaphysics, history, political economy, and such like studies. It is not at all to our present purpose to compare this speculative and indeterminate kind of study with the rigorous accurate education of England. The fault of the former is sometimes to produce a sort of lecturer *in vacuo*, ignorant of exact pursuits, and diffusive of vague words. The English now and then produce a learned creature like a thistle, prickly with all facts, and incapable of all fruit. But, passing by this general question, it cannot be doubted that, as a preparation for the writing of various articles, the system of Edinburgh is enormously superior to that of Cambridge. The particular, compact, exclusive learning of England is inferior in this respect to the general, diversified, omnipresent information of the North; and what is more, the speculative, dubious nature of metaphysical and

such like pursuits tends, in a really strong mind, to cultivate habits of independent thought and original discussion. A bold mind so trained will even *wish* to advance its peculiar ideas, on its own account, in a written and special form; that is, as we said, to write an article. Such are the excellences in this respect of the system of which Horner is an example. The defects tend the same way. It tends, as is said, to make a man fancy he knows everything. "Well then, at least," it may be answered, "I can write an article on everything."

The facility and boldness of the habits so produced were curiously exemplified in Lord Jeffrey. During the first six years of the *Edinburgh Review* he wrote as many as seventy-nine articles; in a like period afterwards he wrote forty. Any one who should expect to find a pure perfection in these miscellaneous productions, should remember their bulk. If all his reviews were reprinted, they would be very many. And all the while, he was a busy lawyer, was editor of the *Review*, did the business, corrected the proof-sheets; and more than all, what one would have thought a very strong man's work, actually managed Henry Brougham. You must not criticise papers like these, rapidly written in the hurry of life, as you would the painful words of an elaborate sage, slowly and with anxious awfulness instructing mankind. Some things, a few things, are for eternity; some, and a good many, are for time. We do not expect the everlastingness of the Pyramids from the vibratory grandeur of a Tyburnian mansion.

The truth is, that Lord Jeffrey was something of a Whig critic. We have hinted, that among the peculiarities of that character, an excessive partiality for new, arduous, overwhelming, original excellence, was by no means to be numbered. Their tendency inclining to the quiet footsteps of custom, they like to trace the exact fulfilment of admitted rules, a just accordance with the familiar features of ancient

merit. But they are most averse to mysticism. A clear, precise, discriminating intellect shrinks at once from the symbolic, the unbounded, the indefinite. The misfortune is that mysticism is true. There certainly are kinds of truths, borne in as it were instinctively on the human intellect, most influential on the character and the heart, yet hardly capable of stringent statement, difficult to limit by an elaborate definition. Their course is shadowy; the mind seems rather to have seen than to see them, more to feel after than definitely apprehend them. They commonly involve an infinite element, which of course cannot be stated precisely, or else a first principle—an original tendency—of our intellectual constitution, which it is impossible not to feel, and yet which it is hard to extricate in terms and words. Of this latter kind is what has been called the religion of Nature, or more exactly perhaps, the religion of the imagination. This is an interpretation of the world. According to it the beauty of the universe has a meaning, its grandeur a soul, its sublimity an expression. As we gaze on the faces of those whom we love; as we watch the light of life in the dawning of their eyes, and the play of their features, and the wildness of their animation; as we trace in changing lineaments a varying sign; as a charm and a thrill seem to run along the tone of a voice, to haunt the mind with a mere word; as a tone seems to roam in the ear; as a trembling fancy hears words that are unspoken; so in Nature the mystical sense finds a motion in the mountain, and a power in the waves, and a meaning in the long white line of the shore, and a thought in the blue of heaven, and a gushing soul in the buoyant light, an unbounded being in the vast void of air, and

> "Wakeful watchings in the pointed stars".

There is a philosophy in this which might be explained, if explaining were to our purpose. It might be advanced that

there are original sources of expression in the essential grandeur and sublimity of Nature, of an analogous though fainter kind, to those familiar, inexplicable signs by which we trace in the very face and outward lineaments of man the existence and working of the mind within. But be this as it may, it is certain that Mr. Wordsworth preached this kind of religion, and that Lord Jeffrey did not believe a word of it. His cool, sharp, collected mind revolted from its mysticism; his detective intelligence was absorbed in its apparent fallaciousness; his light humour made sport with the sublimities of the preacher. His love of perspicuity was vexed by its indefiniteness; the precise philosopher was amazed at its mystic unintelligibility. Finding a little fault was doubtless not unpleasant to him. The reviewer's pen—φόνος ἡρώεσσιν—has seldom been more poignantly wielded. "If," he was told, "you could be alarmed into the semblance of modesty, you would charm everybody; but remember my joke against you" (Sydney Smith *loquitur*) "about the moon. D—n the solar system—bad light—planets too distant—pestered with comets: feeble contrivance; could make a better with great ease." Yet we do not mean that in this great literary feud, either of the combatants had all the right, or gained all the victory. The world has given judgment. Both Mr. Wordsworth and Lord Jeffrey have received their reward. The one had his own generation; the laughter of men, the applause of drawing-rooms, the concurrence of the crowd: the other a succeeding age, the fond enthusiasm of secret students, the lonely rapture of lonely minds. And each has received according to his kind. If all cultivated men speak differently because of the existence of Wordsworth and Coleridge; if not a thoughtful English book has appeared for forty years, without some trace for good or evil of their influence; if sermon-writers subsist upon their thoughts; if "sacred poets" thrive by translating

their weaker portion into the speech of women ; if, when all this is over, some sufficient part of their writing will ever be fitting food for wild musing and solitary meditation, surely this is because they possessed the inner nature—" an intense and glowing mind," " the vision and the faculty divine ".[1] But if, perchance, in their weaker moments, the great authors of the *Lyrical Ballads* did ever imagine that the world was to pause because of their verses : that " Peter Bell" would be popular in drawing-rooms ; that " Christabel " would be perused in the City ; that people of fashion would make a handbook of the " Excursion,"—it was well for them to be told at once that this was not so. Nature ingeniously prepared a shrill artificial voice, which spoke in season and out of season, enough and more than enough, what will ever be the idea of the cities of the plain concerning those who live alone among the mountains ; of the frivolous concerning the grave ; of the gregarious concerning the recluse ; of those who laugh concerning those who laugh not ; of the common concerning the uncommon ; of those who lend on usury concerning those who lend not ; the notion of the world of those whom it will not reckon among the righteous—it said,[2] " This won't do ! " And so in all time will the lovers of polished Liberalism speak, concerning the intense and lonely prophet.

Yet, if Lord Jeffrey had the natural infirmities of a Whig critic, he certainly had also its extrinsic and political advantages. Especially at Edinburgh the Whigs wanted a literary man. The Liberal party in Scotland had long groaned under political exclusion ; they had suffered, with acute mortification, the heavy sway of Henry Dundas, but they had been compensated by a literary supremacy ; in the book-world they enjoyed a domination. On a sudden this was rudely

[1] Wordsworth's " Excursion ".

[2] The first words of Jeffrey's review of the " Excursion " are: " This will never do ".

threatened. The fame of Sir Walter Scott was echoed from the southern world, and appealed to every national sentiment—to the inmost heart of every Scotchman. And what a ruler! a lame Tory, a jocose Jacobite, a laugher at Liberalism, a scoffer at metaphysics, an unbeliever in political economy! What a Gothic ruler for the modern Athens;—was this man to reign over them? It would not have been like human nature, if a strong and intellectual party had not soon found a clever and noticeable rival. Poets, indeed, are not made "to order"; but Byron, speaking the sentiment of his time and circle, counted reviewers their equals. If a Tory produced "Marmion," a Whig wrote the best article upon it; Scott might, so ran Liberal speech, be the best living writer of fiction; Jeffrey, clearly, was the most shrewd and accomplished of literary critics.

And though this was an absurd delusion, Lord Jeffrey was no everyday man. He invented the trade of editorship. Before him an editor was a bookseller's drudge; he is now a distinguished functionary. If Jeffrey was not a great critic, he had, what very great critics have wanted, the art of writing what most people would think good criticism. He might not know his subject, but he knew his readers. People like to read ideas which they can imagine to have been their own. "Why does Scarlett always persuade the jury?" asked a rustic gentleman. "Because there are twelve Scarletts in the jury-box," replied an envious advocate. What Scarlett was in law, Jeffrey was in criticism; he could become that which his readers could not avoid being. He was neither a pathetic writer nor a profound writer; but he was a quick-eyed, bustling, black-haired, sagacious, agreeable man of the world. He had his day, and was entitled to his day; but a gentle oblivion must now cover his already subsiding reputation.

Sydney Smith was an after-dinner writer. His words have

a flow, a vigour, an expression, which is not given to hungry mortals. You seem to read of good wine, of good cheer, of beaming and buoyant enjoyment. There is little trace of labour in his composition ; it is poured forth like an unceasing torrent, rejoicing daily to run its course. And what courage there is in it ! There is as much variety of pluck in writing across a sheet, as in riding across a country. Cautious men have many adverbs, " usually," " nearly," " almost " : safe men begin, " it may be advanced " : you never know precisely what their premises are, nor what their conclusion is ; they go tremulously like a timid rider ; they turn hither and thither ; they do not go straight across a subject, like a masterly mind. A few sentences are enough for a master of sentences. A practical topic wants rough vigour and strong exposition. This is the writing of Sydney Smith. It is suited to the broader kind of important questions. For anything requiring fine nicety of speculation, long elaborateness of deduction, evanescent sharpness of distinction, neither his style nor his mind was fit. He had no patience for long argument, no acuteness for delicate precision, no fangs for recondite research. Writers, like teeth, are divided into incisors and grinders. Sydney Smith was a " molar ". He did not run a long sharp argument into the interior of a question ; he did not, in the common phrase, go deeply into it ; but he kept it steadily under the contact of a strong, capable, heavy, jaw-like understanding,—pressing its surface, effacing its intricacies, grinding it down. Yet, as we said, this is done without toil. The play of the " molar " is instinctive and placid ; he could not help it ; it would seem that he had an enjoyment in it.

The story is, that he liked a bright light ; that when he was a poor parson in the country, he used, not being able to afford more delicate luminaries, to adorn his drawing-room with a hundred little lamps of tin metal and mutton fat.

When you know this, you see it in all his writings. There is the same preference of perspicuity throughout them. Elegance, fine savour, sweet illustration, are quite secondary. His only question to an argument was, "Will it tell?" as to an example, "Will it exemplify?" Like what is called "push" in a practical man, his style goes straight to its object; it is not restrained by the gentle hindrances, the delicate decorums of refining natures. There is nothing more characteristic of the Scandinavian mythology, than that it had a god with a hammer. You have no better illustration of our English humour, than the great success of this huge and healthy organisation.

There is something about this not exactly to the Whig taste. They do not like such broad fun, and rather dislike unlimited statement. Lord Melbourne, it is plain, declined to make him a bishop. In this there might be a vestige of Canningite prejudice, but on the whole, there was the distinction between the two men which there is between the loud wit and the *recherché* thinker—between the bold controversialist and the discriminative statesman. A refined *noblesse* can hardly respect a humorist; he amuses them, and they like him, but they are puzzled to know whether he does not laugh at them as well as with them; and the notion of being laughed at, ever, or on any score, is alien to their shy decorum and suppressed pride. But in a broader point of view, and taking a wider range of general character, there was a good deal in common. More than any one else, Sydney Smith was Liberalism in life. Somebody has defined Liberalism as the spirit of the world. It represents its genial enjoyment, its wise sense, its steady judgment, its preference of the near to the far, of the seen to the unseen; it represents, too, its shrinking from difficult dogma, from stern statement, from imperious superstition. What health is to the animal, Liberalism is to the polity. It is a principle

of fermenting enjoyment, running over all the nerves, inspiring the frame, happy in its mind, easy in its place, glad to behold the sun. All this Sydney Smith, as it were, personified. The biography just published of him will be very serviceable to his fame. He has been regarded too much as a fashionable jester, and metropolitan wit of society. We have now for the first time a description of him as he was,—equally at home in the crude world of Yorkshire, and amid the quintessential refinements of Mayfair. It is impossible to believe that he did not give the epithet to his parish: it is now called Foston *le Clay*. It was a "mute inglorious" Sydney of the district, that invented the name, if it is really older than the century. The place has an obtuse soil, inhabited by stiff-clayed Yorkshiremen. There was nobody in the parish to speak to, only peasants, farmers, and such like (what the clergy call "parishioners") and an old clerk who thought every one who came from London a fool, "but you I do zee, Mr. Smith, be no fool". This was the sort of life.

"I turned schoolmaster, to educate my son, as I could not afford to send him to school. Mrs. Sydney turned schoolmistress, to educate my girls, as I could not afford a governess. I turned farmer, as I could not let my land. A man-servant was too expensive; so I caught up a little garden-girl, made like a mile-stone, christened her Bunch, put a napkin in her hand, and made her my butler. The girls taught her to read, Mrs. Sydney to wait, and I undertook her morals. Bunch became the best butler in the county.

"I had little furniture, so I bought a cart-load of deals; took a carpenter (who came to me for parish relief, called Jack Robinson) with a face like a full-moon, into my service; established him in a barn, and said: 'Jack, furnish my house'. You see the result!

"At last it was suggested that a carriage was much wanted in the establishment. After diligent search, I discovered in the back settlements of a York coach-maker an ancient green chariot, supposed to have been the earliest invention of the kind. I brought it home in triumph to my admiring family. Being somewhat dilapidated, the village tailor lined it,

the village blacksmith repaired it; nay (but for Mrs. Sydney's earnest entreaties), we believe the village painter would have exercised his genius upon the exterior; it escaped this danger however, and the result was wonderful. Each year added to its charms: it grew younger and younger; a new wheel, a new spring; I christened it the *Immortal;* it was known all over the neighbourhood; the village boys cheered it, and the village dogs barked at it; but 'Faber meæ fortunæ' was my motto, and we had no false shame.

"Added to all these domestic cares, I was village parson, village doctor, village comforter, village magistrate, and Edinburgh Reviewer; so you see I had not much time left on my hands to regret London."

It is impossible that this should not at once remind us of the life of Sir Walter Scott. There is the same strong sense, the same glowing, natural pleasure, the same power of dealing with men, the same power of diffusing common happiness. Both enjoyed as much in a day, as an ordinary man in a month. The term "animal spirits" peculiarly expresses this bold enjoyment; it seems to come from a principle intermediate between the mind and the body; to be hardly intellectual enough for the soul, and yet too permeating and aspiring for crude matter. Of course, there is an immense imaginative world in Scott's existence to which Sydney Smith had no claim. But they met upon the present world; they enjoyed the spirit of life; "they loved the world, and the world them;" they did not pain themselves with immaterial speculation—roast beef was an admitted fact. A certain, even excessive practical caution which is ascribed to the Englishman, Scott would have been the better for. Yet his biography would have been the worse. There is nothing in the life before us comparable in interest to the tragic, gradual cracking of the great mind; the overtasking of the great capital, and the ensuing failure; the spectacle of heaving genius breaking in the contact with misfortune. The anticipation of this pain increases the pleasure of the reader; the commencing threads of coming

calamity shade the woof of pleasure; the proximity of suffering softens the ὕβρις, the terrible, fatiguing energy of enjoyment.

A great deal of excellent research has been spent on the difference between "humour" and "wit," into which metaphysical problem "our limits," of course, forbid us to enter. There is, however, between them, the distinction of dry sticks and green sticks; there is in humour a living energy, a diffused potency, a noble sap; it grows upon the character of the humorist. Wit is part of the machinery of the intellect; as Madame de Staël says, "*La gaieté de l'esprit est facile à tous les hommes d'esprit*". We wonder Mr. Babbage does not invent a punning-engine; it is just as possible as a calculating one. Sydney Smith's mirth was essentially humorous; it clings to the character of the man; as with the sayings of Dr. Johnson, there is a species of personality attaching to it; the word is more graphic because Sydney Smith—that man being the man that he was—said it, than it would have been if said by any one else. In a desponding moment, he would have it he was none the better for the jests which he made, any more than a bottle for the wine which passed through it: this is a true description of many a wit, but he was very unjust in attributing it to himself.

Sydney Smith is often compared to Swift; but this only shows with how little thought our common criticism is written. The two men have really nothing in common, except that they were both high in the Church, and both wrote amusing letters about Ireland. Of course, to the great constructive and elaborative power displayed in Swift's longer works, Sydney Smith has no pretension; he could not have written *Gulliver's Travels;* but so far as the two series of Irish letters goes, it seems plain that he has the advantage. Plymley's letters are true; the treatment may be incomplete—the Catholic religion may have latent

dangers and insidious attractions which are not there mentioned—but the main principle is sound ; the common sense of religious toleration is hardly susceptible of better explanation. Drapier's letters, on the contrary, are essentially absurd ; they are a clever appeal to ridiculous prejudices. Who cares now for a disputation on the evils to be apprehended a hundred years ago from adulterated halfpence, especially when we know that the halfpence were not adulterated, and that if they had been, those evils would never have arisen ? Any one, too, who wishes to make a collection of currency crotchets, will find those letters worth his attention. No doubt there is a clever affectation of common-sense, as in all of Swift's political writings, and the style has an air of business ; yet, on the other hand, there are no passages which any one would now care to quote for their manner and their matter ; and there are many in "Plymley" that will be constantly cited, so long as existing controversies are at all remembered. The whole genius of the two writers is emphatically opposed. Sydney Smith's is the ideal of popular, buoyant, riotous fun ; it cries and laughs with boisterous mirth ; it rolls hither and thither like a mob, with elastic and commonplace joy. Swift was a detective in a dean's wig ; he watched the mob ; his whole wit is a kind of dexterous indication of popular frailties ; he hated the crowd ; he was a spy on beaming smiles, and a common informer against genial enjoyment. His whole essence was a soreness against mortality. Show him innocent mirth, he would say, How absurd ! He was painfully wretched, no doubt, in himself: perhaps, as they say, he had no heart ; but his mind, his brain had a frightful capacity for secret pain ; his sharpness was the sharpness of disease ; his power the sole acumen of morbid wretchedness. It is impossible to fancy a parallel more proper to show the excellence, the unspeakable superiority of a buoyant and bounding writer.

At the same time, it is impossible to give to Sydney Smith the highest rank, even as a humorist. Almost all his humour has reference to the incongruity of special means to special ends. The notion of Plymley is want of conformity between the notions of "my brother Abraham," and the means of which he makes use; of the quiet clergyman, who was always told he was a bit of a goose, advocating conversion by muskets, and stopping Bonaparte by Peruvian bark. The notion of the letters to Archdeacon Singleton is, a bench of bishops placidly and pleasantly destroying the Church. It is the same with most of his writings. Even when there is nothing absolutely practical in the idea, the subject is from the scenery of practice, from concrete entities, near institutions, superficial facts. You might quote a hundred instances. Here is one: "A gentleman, in speaking of a nobleman's wife of great rank and fortune, lamented very much that she had no children. A medical gentleman who was present observed, that to have no children was a great misfortune, but he had often observed it was *hereditary* in families." This is what we mean by saying his mirth lies in the superficial relations of phenomena (some will say we are pompous, like the medical man); in the relation of one external fact to another external fact; of one detail of common life to another detail of common life. But this is not the highest topic of humour. Taken as a whole, the universe is absurd. There seems an unalterable contradiction between the human mind and its employments. How can a *soul* be a merchant? What relation to an immortal being have the price of linseed, the fall of butter, the tare on tallow, or the brokerage on hemp? Can an undying creature debit "petty expenses," and charge for "carriage paid"? All the world's a stage;—"the satchel, and the shining morning face"—the "strange oaths";—"the bubble reputation"—the

> "Eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
> Full of wise saws and modern instances".[1]

Can these things be real? Surely they are acting. What relation have they to the truth as we see it in theory? What connection with our certain hopes, our deep desires, our craving and infinite thought? "In respect of itself, it is a good life; but in respect it is a shepherd's life, it is nought." The soul ties its shoe; the mind washes its hands in a basin. All is incongruous.

"*Shallow.* Certain, 'tis certain; very sure, very sure; death, as the Psalmist saith, is certain to all; all shall die.—How a good yoke of bullocks at Stamford fair?

Silence. Truly, cousin, I was not there.

Shallow. Death is certain.—Is old Double, of your town, living yet?

Silence. Dead, sir.

Shallow. Dead. See! See! He drew a good bow,—and dead. He shot a fine shoot. John of Gaunt loved him well, and betted much money on his head.—Dead! He would have clapped i' the clout at fourscore, and carried you a forehandshaft, a fourteen and fourteen and a half, that it would have done a man's heart good to see.—How a score of ewes now?

Silence. Thereafter as they be; a score of ewes may be worth ten pounds.

Shallow. And is Double dead!—"[2]

It is because Sydney Smith had so little of this Shakespearian humour, that there is a glare in his pages, and that in the midst of his best writing, we sigh for the soothing superiority of quieter writers.

Sydney Smith was not only the wit of the first Edinburgh, but likewise the divine. He was, to use his own expression, the only clergyman who in those days "turned out" to fight the battles of the Whigs. In some sort this was not so important. A curious abstinence from religious topics

[1] Shakespeare: "As You Like It".
[2] Shakespeare: "Henry IV.".

characterises the original *Review*. There is a wonderful omission of this most natural topic of speculation in the lives of Horner and Jeffrey. In truth, it would seem that, living in the incessant din of a Calvinistic country, the best course for thoughtful and serious men was to be silent—at least they instinctively thought so. They felt no involuntary call to be theological teachers themselves, and gently recoiled from the coarse admonition around them. Even in the present milder time, few cultivated persons willingly think on the special dogmas of distinct theology. They do not deny them, but they live apart from them: they do not disbelieve them, but they are silent when they are stated. They do not question the existence of Kamschatka, but they have no call to busy themselves with Kamschatka; they abstain from peculiar tenets. Nor in truth is this, though much aggravated by existing facts, a mere accident of this age. There are some people to whom such a course of conduct is always natural: there are certain persons who do not, as it would seem cannot, feel all that others feel; who have, so to say, no *ear* for much of religion: who are in some sort out of its reach. "It is impossible," says a divine of the Church of England,[1] "not to observe that innumerable persons (may we not say the majority of mankind?) who have a belief in God and immortality, have, nevertheless, scarcely any consciousness of the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel. They seem to live aloof from them in the world of business or of pleasure, 'the common life of all men,' not without a sense of right, and a rule of truth and honesty, yet insensible" to much which we need no name. "They have never in their whole lives experienced the love of God, the sense of sin, or the need of forgiveness. Often they are remarkable for the purity of their morals; many of them have strong and disinterested attachments

[1] Dr. Jowett.

and quick human sympathies; sometimes a stoical feeling of uprightness, or a peculiar sensitiveness to dishonour. It would be a mistake to say that they are without religion. They join in its public acts; they are offended at profaneness or impiety; they are thankful for the blessings of life, and do not rebel against its misfortunes. Such men meet us at every step. They are those whom we know and associate with; honest in their dealings, respectable in their lives, decent in their conversation. The Scripture speaks to us of two classes, represented by the Church and the world, the wheat and the tares, the sheep and the goats, the friends and enemies of God. We cannot say in which of these two divisions we should find a place for them." They believe always a kind of "natural religion". Now these are what we may call, in the language of the present, Liberals. Those who can remember, or who will re-read our delineation of the Whig character, may observe its conformity. There is the same purity and delicacy, the same tranquil sense; an equal want of imagination, of impulsive enthusiasm, of shrinking fear. You need not speak like the above writer of "peculiar doctrines"; the phenomenon is no speciality of a particular creed. Glance over the whole of history. As the classical world stood beside the Jewish; as Horace beside St. Paul; like the heavy ark and the buoyant waves, so are men in contrast with one another. You cannot imagine a classical Isaiah; you cannot fancy a Whig St. Dominic; there is no such thing as a Liberal Augustine. The deep sea of mysticism lies opposed to some natures; in some moods it is a sublime wonder; in others an "impious ocean,"—they will never put forth on it at any time.

All this is intelligible, and in a manner beautiful as a character; but it is not equally excellent as a creed. A certain class of Liberal divines have endeavoured to petrify into a theory, a pure and placid disposition. In some respects Sydney

Smith is one of these; his sermons are the least excellent of his writings; of course they are sensible and well-intentioned, but they have the defect of his school. With misdirected energy, these divines have laboured after a plain religion; they have forgotten that a quiet and definite mind is confined to a placid and definite world; that religion has its essence in awe, its charm in infinity, its sanction in dread; that its dominion is an inexplicable dominion; that mystery is its power. There is a reluctance in all such writers; they creep away from the unintelligible parts of the subject: they always seem to have something behind;—not to like to bring out what they know to be at hand. They are in their nature apologists; and, as George the Third said: "I did not know the Bible needed an apology". As well might the thunder be ashamed to roll, as religion hesitate to be too awful for mankind. The invective of Lucretius is truer than the placid patronage of the divine. Let us admire Liberals in life, but let us keep no terms with Paleyans in speculation.

And so we must draw to a conclusion. We have in some sort given a description of, with one great exception, the most remarkable men connected at its origin with the *Edinburgh Review*. And that exception is a man of too fitful, defective, and strange greatness to be spoken of now. Henry Brougham must be left to after-times. Indeed, he would have marred the unity of our article. He was connected with the Whigs, but he never was one. His impulsive ardour is the opposite of their coolness; his irregular, discursive intellect contrasts with their quiet and perfecting mind. Of those of whom we have spoken, let us say, that if none of them attained to the highest rank of abstract intellect; if the disposition of none of them was ardent or glowing enough to hurry them forward to the extreme point of daring greatness; if only one can be said to have a lasting place in real literature:—it is clear that they vanquished a

slavish cohort; that they upheld the name of freemen in a time of bondmen; that they applied themselves to that which was real, and accomplished much which was very difficult; that the very critics who question their inimitable excellence will yet admire their just and scarcely imitable example.

EDWARD GIBBON.[1]

(1856.)

A WIT said of Gibbon's autobiography, that he did not know the difference between himself and the Roman Empire. He has narrated his "progressions from London to Buriton, and from Buriton to London," in the same monotonous majestic periods that record the fall of states and empires. The consequence is, that a fascinating book gives but a vague idea of its subject. It may not be without its use to attempt a description of him in plainer though less splendid English.

The diligence of their descendant accumulated many particulars of the remote annals of the Gibbon family; but its real founder was the grandfather of the historian, who lived in the times of the "South Sea". He was a capital man of business according to the custom of that age—a dealer in many kinds of merchandise—like perhaps the "complete tradesman" of Defoe, who was to understand the price and quality of *all* articles made within the kingdom. The preference, however, of Edward Gibbon the grandfather was for the article "shares"; his genius, like that of Mr. Hudson, had a natural tendency towards a commerce in the metaphysical and non-existent; and he was fortunate in the age on which his lot was thrown. It afforded many opportunities of gratifying that taste. Much has been

[1] *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* By Edward Gibbon, Esq. With Notes by Dean Milman and M. Guizot. Edited, with additional Notes, by William Smith, LL.D. In Eight Volumes. London, 1855. Murray.

written on panics and manias—much more than with the most outstretched intellect we are able to follow or conceive; but one thing is certain, that at particular times a great many stupid people have a great deal of stupid money. Saving people have often only the faculty of saving; they accumulate ably, and contemplate their accumulations with approbation; but what to do with them they do not know. Aristotle, who was not in trade, imagined that money is barren; and barren it is to quiet ladies, rural clergymen, and country misers. Several economists have plans for preventing improvident speculation; one would abolish Peel's act, and substitute one-pound notes; another would retain Peel's act, and make the calling for one-pound notes a capital crime: but our scheme is, not to allow any man to have a hundred pounds who cannot prove to the satisfaction of the Lord Chancellor that he knows what to do with a hundred pounds. The want of this easy precaution allows the accumulation of wealth in the hands of rectors, authors, grandmothers, who have no knowledge of business, and no idea except that their money now produces nothing, and ought and must be forced immediately to produce something. "I wish," said one of this class, "for the largest immediate income, and I am therefore naturally disposed to purchase an *advowson*." At intervals, from causes which are not to the present purpose, the money of these people—the blind capital (as we call it) of the country—is particularly large and craving; it seeks for some one to devour it, and there is "plethora"—it finds some one, and there is "speculation" —it is devoured, and there is "panic". The age of Mr. Gibbon was one of these. The interest of money was very low, perhaps under three per cent. The usual consequence followed; able men started wonderful undertakings; the ablest of all, a company "for carrying on an undertaking of great importance, but no one to know what it was". Mr.

Gibbon was not idle. According to the narrative of his grandson, he already filled a considerable position, was worth sixty thousand pounds, and had great influence both in Parliament and in the City. He applied himself to the greatest bubble of all—one so great, that it is spoken of in many books as the cause and parent of all contemporary bubbles—the South-Sea Company—the design of which was to reduce the interest on the national debt, which, oddly enough, it did reduce, and to trade exclusively to the South Sea or Spanish America, where of course it hardly did trade. Mr. Gibbon became a director, sold and bought, traded and prospered; and was considered, perhaps with truth, to have obtained much money. The bubble was essentially a fashionable one. Public intelligence and the quickness of communication did not then as now at once spread pecuniary information and misinformation to secluded districts; but fine ladies, men of fashion—the London world—ever anxious to make as much of its money as it can, and then wholly unwise (it is not now very wise) in discovering how the most *was* to be made of it—"went in" and speculated largely. As usual, all was favourable as long as the shares were rising; the price was at one time very high, and the agitation very general; it was, in a word, the railway mania in the South Sea. After a time, the shares "hesitated," declined, and fell; and there was an outcry against everybody concerned in the matter, very like the outcry against the οἱ περὶ Hudson in our own time. The results, however, were very different. Whatever may be said, and, judging from the late experience, a good deal is likely to be said, as to the advantages of civilisation and education, it seems certain that they tend to diminish a simple-minded energy. The Parliament of 1720 did not, like the Parliament of 1847, allow itself to be bored and incommoded by legal minutiæ, nor did it forego the use of plain words. A committee

reported the discovery of "a train of the deepest villainy and fraud *hell* ever contrived to ruin a nation"; the directors of the company were arrested, and Mr. Gibbon among the rest; he was compelled to give in a list of his effects: the general wish was that a retrospective act should be immediately passed, which would impose on him penalties something like, or even more severe than, those now enforced on Paul and Strahan. In the end, however, Mr. Gibbon escaped with a parliamentary conversation upon his affairs. His estate amounted to £140,000; and as this was a great sum, there was an obvious suspicion that he was a great criminal. The scene must have been very curious. "Allowances of twenty pounds or one shilling were facetiously voted. A vague report that a director had formerly been concerned in another project by which some unknown persons had lost their money, was admitted as a proof of his actual guilt. One man was ruined because he had dropped a foolish speech that his horses should feed upon gold; another because he was grown so proud, that one day, at the Treasury, he had refused a civil answer to persons far above him." The vanity of his descendant is evidently a little tried by the peculiar severity with which his grandfather was treated. Out of his £140,000 it was proposed that he should retain only £15,000; and on an amendment even this was reduced to £10,000. Yet there is some ground for believing that the acute energy and practised pecuniary power which had been successful in obtaining so large a fortune, were likewise applied with science to the inferior task of retaining some of it. The historian indeed says: "On these ruins," the £10,000 aforesaid, "with skill and credit of which Parliament had not been able to deprive him, my grandfather erected the edifice of a new fortune: the labours of sixteen years were amply rewarded; and I have reason to believe that the second structure was not much inferior to the first".

But this only shows how far a family feeling may bias a sceptical judgment. The credit of a man in Mr. Gibbon's position could not be very lucrative; and his skill must have been enormous to have obtained so much at the end of his life, in such circumstances, in so few years. Had he been an early Christian, the narrative of his descendant would have contained an insidious hint, "that pecuniary property *may* be so secreted as to defy the awkward approaches of political investigation". That he died rich is certain, for two generations lived solely on the property he bequeathed.

The son of this great speculator, the historian's father, was a man to spend a fortune quietly. He is not related to have indulged in any particular expense, and nothing is more difficult to follow than the pecuniary fortunes of deceased families; but one thing is certain, that the property which descended to the historian—making every allowance for all minor and subsidiary modes of diminution, such as daughters' settlements, legacies, and so forth—was enormously less than £140,000; and therefore if those figures are correct, the second generation must have made itself very happy out of the savings of the past generation, and without caring for the poverty of the next. Nothing that is related of the historian's father indicates a strong judgment or an acute discrimination; and there are some scarcely dubious signs of a rather weak character.

Edward Gibbon, the great, was born on the 27th of April, 1737. Of his mother we hear scarcely anything; and what we do hear is not remarkably favourable. It seems that she was a faint, inoffensive woman, of ordinary capacity, who left a very slight trace of her influence on the character of her son, did little, and died early. The real mother, as he is careful to explain, of his understanding and education was her sister, and his aunt, *Mrs.* Catherine Porten, according to

the speech of that age, a maiden lady of much vigour and capacity, and for whom her pupil really seems to have felt as much affection as was consistent with a rather easy and cool nature. There is a panegyric on her in the *Memoirs;* and in a long letter upon the occasion of her death, he deposes: "To her care I am indebted in earliest infancy for the preservation of my life and health. . . . To her instructions I owe the first rudiments of knowledge, the first exercise of reason, and a taste for books, which is still the pleasure and glory of my life; and though she taught me neither language nor science, she was certainly the most useful preceptress I ever had. As I grew up, an intercourse of thirty years endeared her to me as the faithful friend and the agreeable companion. You have observed with what freedom and confidence we lived," etc., etc. To a less sentimental mind, which takes a more tranquil view of aunts and relatives, it is satisfactory to find that somehow he could not write to her. "I wish," he continues, "I had as much to applaud and as little to reproach in my conduct to Mrs. Porten since I left England; and when I reflect that my letter would have soothed and comforted her decline, I feel"—what an ardent nephew would naturally feel at so unprecedented an event. Leaving his maturer years out of the question—a possible rhapsody of affectionate eloquence—she seems to have been of the greatest use to him in infancy. His health was very imperfect. We hear much of rheumatism, and lameness, and weakness; and he was unable to join in work and play with ordinary boys. He was moved from one school to another, never staying anywhere very long, and owing what knowledge he obtained rather to a strong retentive understanding than to any external stimulants or instruction. At one place he gained an acquaintance with the Latin elements at the price of "many tears and some blood". At last he was consigned to the instruction of an elegant clergyman,

the Rev. Philip Francis, who had obtained notoriety by a metrical translation of Horace, the laxity of which is even yet complained of by construing school-boys, and who, with a somewhat Horatian taste, went to London as often as he could, and translated *invisa negotia* as "boys to beat".

In school-work, therefore, Gibbon had uncommon difficulties and unusual deficiencies; but these were much more than counterbalanced by a habit which often accompanies a sickly childhood, and is the commencement of a studious life, the habit of desultory reading. The instructiveness of this is sometimes not comprehended. S. T. Coleridge used to say that he felt a great superiority over those who had not read—and fondly read—fairy tales in their childhood; he thought they wanted a sense which he possessed, the perception, or apperception—we do not know which he used to say it was—of the unity and wholeness of the universe. As to fairy tales, this is a hard saying; but as to desultory reading, it is certainly true. Some people have known a time in life when there was no book they could not read. The fact of its being a book went immensely in its favour. In early life there is an opinion that the obvious thing to do with a horse is to ride it; with a cake, to eat it; with sixpence, to spend it. A few boys carry this further, and think the natural thing to do with a book is to read it. There is an argument from design in the subject: if the book was not meant for that purpose, for what purpose was it meant? Of course, of any understanding of the works so perused there is no question or idea. There is a legend of Bentham, in his earliest childhood, climbing to the height of a huge stool and sitting there evening after evening with two candles, engaged in the perusal of Rapin's history. It might as well have been any other book. The doctrine of utility had not then dawned on its immortal teacher; *cui bono* was an idea unknown to him. He would have been ready to read about Egypt, about Spain.

about coals in Borneo, the teak-wood in India, the current in the river Mississippi, on natural history or human history, on theology or morals, on the state of the dark ages or the state of the light ages, on Augustulus or Lord Chatham, on the first century or the seventeenth, on the moon, the millennium, or the whole duty of man. Just then, reading is an end in itself. At that time of life you no more think of a future consequence, of the remote, the very remote possibility of deriving knowledge from the perusal of a book, than you expect so great a result from spinning a peg-top. You spin the top, and you read the book; and these scenes of life are exhausted. In such studies, of all prose perhaps the best is history. One page is so like another; battle No. 1 is so much on a par with battle No. 2. Truth may be, as they say, stranger than fiction, abstractedly; but in actual books, novels are certainly odder and more astounding than correct history. It will be said, what is the use of this? Why not leave the reading of great books till a great age? Why plague and perplex childhood with complex facts remote from its experience and inapprehensible by its imagination? The reply is, that though in all great and combined facts there is much which childhood cannot thoroughly imagine, there is also in very many a great deal which can only be truly apprehended for the first time at that age. Catch an American of thirty;—tell him about the battle of Marathon; what will he be able to comprehend of all that you mean by it; of all that halo which early impression and years of remembrance have cast around it? He may add up the killed and wounded, estimate the missing, and take the dimensions of Greece and Athens; but he will not seem to care much. He may say, "Well, sir, perhaps it was a smart thing in that small territory; but it is a long time ago, and in my country James K. Burnup"—did that which he will at length explain to you. Or try an

experiment on yourself. Read the account of a Circassian victory, equal in numbers, in daring, in romance, to the old battle. Will you be able to feel about it at all in the same way? It is impossible. You cannot form a new set of associations; your mind is involved in pressing facts, your memory choked by a thousand details; the liveliness of fancy is gone with the childhood by which it was enlivened. Schamyl will never seem as great as Leonidas, or Miltiades; Cnokemof, or whoever the Russian is, cannot be so imposing as Xerxes; the unpronounceable place cannot strike on your heart like Marathon or Platæa. Moreover, there is the further advantage which Coleridge shadowed forth in the remark we cited. Youth has a principle of consolidation. We begin with the whole. Small sciences are the labours of our manhood; but the round universe is the plaything of the boy. His fresh mind shoots out vaguely and crudely into the infinite and eternal. Nothing is hid from the depth of it; there are no boundaries to its vague and wandering vision. Early science, it has been said, begins in utter nonsense; it would be truer to say that it starts with boyish fancies. How absurd seem the notions of the first Greeks! Who could believe now that air or water was the principle, the pervading substance, the eternal material of all things? Such affairs will never explain a thick rock. And what a white original for a green and sky-blue world! Yet people disputed in those ages not whether it was either of those substances, but which of them it was. And doubtless there was a great deal, at least in quantity, to be said on both sides. Boys are improved; but some in our own day have asked, "Mamma, I say, what did God make the world of?" and several, who did not venture on speech, have had an idea of some one grey primitive thing, felt a difficulty as to how the red came, and wondered that marble could *ever* have been the same as moonshine. This is in truth the picture

of life. We begin with the infinite and eternal, which we shall never apprehend; and these form a framework, a schedule, a set of co-ordinates to which we refer all which we learn later. At first, like the old Greek, "we look up to the whole sky, and are lost in the one and the all"; in the end we classify and enumerate, learn each star, calculate distances, draw cramped diagrams on the unbounded sky, write a paper on α Cygni and a treatise on ε Draconis, map special facts upon the indefinite void, and engrave precise details on the infinite and everlasting. So in history; somehow the whole comes in boyhood; the details later and in manhood. The wonderful series going far back to the times of old patriarchs with their flocks and herds, the keen-eyed Greek, the stately Roman, the watching Jew, the uncouth Goth, the horrid Hun, the settled picture of the unchanging East, the restless shifting of the rapid West, the rise of the cold and classical civilisation, its fall, the rough impetuous middle ages, the vague warm picture of ourselves and home,—when did we learn these? Not yesterday nor to-day; but long ago, in the first dawn of reason, in the original flow of fancy. What we learn afterwards are but the accurate littlenesses of the great topic, the dates and tedious facts. Those who begin late learn only these; but the happy first feel the mystic associations and the progress of the whole.

There is no better illustration of all this than Gibbon. Few have begun early with a more desultory reading, and fewer still have described it so skilfully. "From the ancient I leaped to the modern world; many crude lumps of Speed, Rapin, Mezeray, Davila, Machiavel, Father Paul, Bower, etc., I devoured like so many novels; and I swallowed with the same voracious appetite the description of India and China, of Mexico and Peru. My first introduction to the historic scenes which have since engaged so many years of my life must be ascribed to an accident. In the summer

of 1751 I accompanied my father on a visit to Mr. Hoare's, in Wiltshire; but I was less delighted with the beauties of Stourhead than with discovering in the library a common book, the *Continuation of Echard's Roman History*, which is, indeed, executed with more skill and taste than the previous work. To me the reigns of the successors of Constantine were absolutely new; and I was immersed in the passage of the Goths over the Danube when the summons of the dinner-bell reluctantly dragged me from my intellectual feast. This transient glance served rather to irritate than to appease my curiosity; and as soon as I returned to Bath I procured the second and third volumes of Howel's *History of the World*, which exhibit the Byzantine period on a larger scale. Mahomet and his Saracens soon fixed my attention; and some instinct of criticism directed me to the genuine sources. Simon Ockley, an original in every sense, first opened my eyes; and I was led from one book to another till I had ranged round the circle of Oriental history. Before I was sixteen I had exhausted all that could be learned in English of the Arabs and Persians, the Tartars and Turks; and the same ardour urged me to guess at the French of D'Herbelot, and to construe the barbarous Latin of Pocock's *Abulfaragius*." To this day the schoolboy student of the *Decline and Fall* feels the traces of that schoolboy reading. *Once*, he is conscious, the author like him felt, and solely felt, the magnificent progress of the great story and the scenic aspect of marvellous events.

A more sudden effect was at hand. However exalted may seem the praises which we have given to loose and unplanned reading, we are not saying that it is the sole ingredient of a good education. Besides this sort of education, which some boys will voluntarily and naturally give themselves, there needs, of course, another and more rigorous kind, which must be impressed upon them from without.

The terrible difficulty of early life—the *use* of pastors and masters—really is, that they compel boys to a distinct mastery of that which they do not wish to learn. There is nothing to be said for a preceptor who is not dry. Mr. Carlyle describes with bitter satire the fate of one of his heroes who was obliged to acquire whole systems of information in which he, the hero, saw no use, and which he kept as far as might be in a vacant corner of his mind. And this is the very point—dry language, tedious mathematics, a thumbed grammar, a detested slate, form gradually an interior separate intellect, exact in its information, rigid in its requirements, disciplined in its exercises. The two grow together, the early natural fancy touching the far extremities of the universe, lightly playing with the scheme of all things; the precise, compacted memory slowly accumulating special facts, exact habits, clear and painful conceptions. At last, as it were in a moment, the clouds break up, the division sweeps away; we find that in fact these exercises which puzzled us, these languages which we hated, these details which we despised, are the instruments of true thought, are the very keys and openings, the exclusive access to the knowledge which we loved.

In this second education the childhood of Gibbon had been very defective. He had never been placed under any rigid training. In his first boyhood he had disputed with his aunt, "that were I master of Greek and Latin, I must interpret to myself in English the thoughts of the original, and that such extemporary versions must be inferior to the elaborate translation of professed scholars: a silly sophism," as he remarks, "which could not easily be confuted by a person ignorant of any other language than her own". Ill-health, a not very wise father, an ill-chosen succession of schools and pedagogues, prevented his acquiring exact knowledge in the regular subjects of study. His own description

is the best—"erudition that might have puzzled a doctor, and ignorance of which a schoolboy should have been ashamed". The amiable Mr. Francis, who was to have repaired the deficiency, went to London, and forgot him. With an impulse of discontent his father took a resolution, and sent him to Oxford at sixteen.

It is probable that a worse place could not have been found. The University of Oxford was at the nadir of her history and efficiency. The public professorial training of the middle ages had died away, and the intramural collegiate system of the present time had not begun. The University had ceased to be a teaching body, and had not yet become an examining body. "The professors," says Adam Smith, who had studied there, "have given up almost the pretence of lecturing." "The examination," said a great judge[1] some years later, "was a farce in my time. I was asked who founded University College; and I said, though the fact is now doubted, that King Alfred founded it; and *that* was the examination." The colleges, deprived of the superintendence and watchfulness of their natural sovereign, fell, as Gibbon remarks, into "port and prejudice". The Fellows were a close corporation; they were chosen from every conceivable motive—because they were respectable men, because they were good fellows, because they were brothers of other Fellows, because their fathers had patronage in the Church. Men so appointed could not be expected to be very diligent in the instruction of youth; many colleges did not even profess it; that of All Souls has continued down to our own time to deny that it has anything to do with it. Undoubtedly a person who came thither accurately and rigidly drilled in technical scholarship found many means and a few motives to pursue it. Some tutorial system probably existed at most colleges. Learning was not wholly useless in the Church.

[1] Eldon.

The English gentleman has ever loved a nice and classical scholarship. But these advantages were open only to persons who had received a very strict training, and who were voluntarily disposed to discipline themselves still more. To the mass of mankind the University was a "graduating machine"; the colleges, monopolist residences,—hotels without bells.

Taking the place as it stood, the lot of Gibbon may be thought rather fortunate. He was placed at Magdalen, whose fascinating walks, so beautiful in the later autumn, still recall the name of Addison, the example of the merits, as Gibbon is of the deficiencies, of Oxford. His first tutor was, in his own opinion, "one of the best of the tribe". "Dr. Waldegrave was a learned and pious man, of a mild disposition, strict morals, and abstemious life, who seldom mingled in the politics or the jollity of the college. But his knowledge of the world was confined to the University; his learning was of the last, rather than of the present age; his temper was indolent; his faculties, which were not of the first rate, had been relaxed by the climate; and he was satisfied, like his fellows, with the slight and superficial discharge of an important trust. As soon as my tutor had sounded the insufficiency of his disciple in school-learning, he proposed that we should read every morning, from ten to eleven, the comedies of Terence. The sum of my improvement in the University of Oxford is confined to three or four Latin plays; and even the study of an elegant classic, which might have been illustrated by a comparison of ancient and modern theatres, was reduced to a dry and literal interpretation of the author's text. During the first weeks I constantly attended these lessons in my tutor's room; but as they appeared equally devoid of profit and pleasure, I was once tempted to try the experiment of a formal apology. The apology was accepted with a smile. I repeated the

offence with less ceremony; the excuse was admitted with the same indulgence: the slightest motive of laziness or indisposition, the most trifling avocation at home or abroad, was allowed as a worthy impediment; nor did my tutor appear conscious of my absence or neglect. Had the hour of lecture been constantly filled, a single hour was a small portion of my academic leisure. No plan of study was recommended for my use; no exercises were prescribed for his inspection; and at the most precious season of youth, whole days and weeks were suffered to elapse without labour or amusement, without advice or account." The name of his second tutor is concealed in asterisks, and the sensitive conscience of Dean Milman will not allow him to insert a name "which *Gibbon* thought proper to suppress". The account, however, of the anonymous person is sufficiently graphic. "Dr. * * * * well remembered that he had a salary to receive, and only forgot that he had a duty to perform. Instead of guiding the studies and watching over the behaviour of his disciple, I was never summoned to attend even the ceremony of a lecture; and excepting one voluntary visit to his rooms, during the eight months of his titular office the tutor and pupil lived in the same college as strangers to each other." It added to the evils of this neglect, that Gibbon was much younger than most of the students; and that his temper, which was through life reserved, was then very shy. His appearance, too, was odd; "a thin little figure, with a large head, disputing and arguing with the greatest ability". Of course he was a joke among undergraduates; he consulted his tutor as to studying Arabic, and was seen buying *La Bibliothèque Orientale d'Herbelot*, and immediately a legend was diffused that he had turned Mahomedan. The random cast was not so far from the mark: cut off by peculiarities from the society of young people; deprived of regular tuition and systematic

employment; tumbling about among crude masses of heterogeneous knowledge; alone with the heated brain of youth,—he did what an experienced man would expect—he framed a theory of all things. No doubt it seemed to him the most natural thing in the world. Was he to be the butt of ungenial wine-parties, or spend his lonely hours on shreds of languages? Was he not to know the *truth?* There were the old problems, the everlasting difficulties, the *mœnia mundi,* the Hercules' pillars of the human imagination—"fate, free-will, fore-knowledge absolute".[1] Surely these should come first; when we had learned the great landmarks, understood the guiding-stars, we might amuse ourselves with small points, and make a plaything of curious information. What particular theory the mind frames when in this state is a good deal matter of special accident. The data for considering these difficulties are not within its reach. Whether man be or be not born to solve the "mystery of the knowable," he certainly is not born to solve it at seventeen, with the first hot rush of the untrained mind. The selection of Gibbon was remarkable: he became a Roman Catholic.

It seems now so natural that an Oxford man should take this step, that one can hardly understand the astonishment it created. Lord Sheffield tells us that the Privy Council interfered; and with good administrative judgment examined a London bookseller—some Mr. Lewis—who had no concern in it. In the manor-house of Buriton it would have probably created less sensation if "dear Edward" had announced his intention of becoming a monkey. The English have ever believed that the Papist is a kind of *creature;* and every sound mind would prefer a beloved child to produce a tail, a hide of hair, and a taste for nuts, in comparison with transubstantiation, wax-candles, and a belief in the glories of Mary.

[1] "Paradise Lost," book ii.

What exact motives impelled Gibbon to this step cannot now be certainly known; the autobiography casts a mist over them; but from what appears, his conversion partly much resembled, and partly altogether differed from, the Oxford conversions of our own time. We hear nothing of the notes of a church, or the sin of the Reformation; and Gibbon had not an opportunity of even rejecting Mr. Sewell's[1] theory that it is "a holy obligation to acquiesce in the opinions of your grandmother". His memoirs have a halo of great names—Bossuet, the *History of Protestant Variations*, etc., etc.—and he speaks with becoming dignity of falling by a noble hand. He mentioned also to Lord Sheffield, as having had a prepondering influence over him, the works of Father Parsons, who lived in Queen Elizabeth's time. But in all probability these were secondary persuasions, justifications after the event. No young man, or scarcely any young man of seventeen, was ever converted by a systematic treatise, especially if written in another age, wearing an obsolete look, speaking a language which scarcely seems that of this world. There is an unconscious reasoning: "The world has had this book before it so long, and has withstood it. There must be something wrong; it seems all right on the surface, but a flaw there must be." The mass of the volumes, too, is unfavourable. "All the treatises in the world," says the young convert in *Loss and Gain*,[2] "are not equal to giving one a view in a moment." What the youthful mind requires is this short decisive argument, this view in a moment, this flash as it were of the understanding, which settles all, and diffuses a conclusive light at once and for ever over the whole. It is so much the pleasanter if the young mind can strike this view out for itself, from materials which are forced upon it from the

[1] Professor of Moral Philosophy at Oxford.

[2] By J. H. Newman, chap. xvii.

controversies of the day; if it can find a certain solution of pending questions, and show itself wiser even than the wisest of its own, the very last age. So far as appears, this was the fortune of Gibbon. "It was not long," he says, "since Dr. Middleton's *Free Inquiry* had sounded an alarm in the theological world; much ink and much gall had been spent in defence of the primitive miracles; and the two dullest of their champions were crowned with academic honours by the University of Oxford. The name of Middleton was unpopular; and his proscription very naturally led me to peruse his writings and those of his antagonists." It is not difficult to discover in this work easy and striking arguments which might lead an untaught mind to the communion of Rome. As to the peculiar belief of its author, there has been much controversy, with which we have not here the least concern; but the natural conclusion to which it would lead a simple intellect is, that all miracles are equally certain or equally uncertain. "It being agreed, then," says the acute controversialist, "that in the original promise of these miraculous gifts there is no intimation of any particular period to which their continuance was limited, the next question is, by what sort of evidence the precise time of their duration is to be determined? But to this point one of the writers just referred to excuses himself, as we have seen, from giving any answer; and thinks it sufficient to declare in general that *the earliest fathers unanimously affirm them to have continued down to their times.* Yet he has not told us, as he ought to have done, to what age he limits the character of *the earliest fathers;* whether to the second or to the third century, or, with the generality of our writers, he means also to include the fourth. But to whatever age he may restrain it, the difficulty at last will be to assign a reason why he must needs stop there. In the meanwhile, by his appealing thus to the *earliest fathers* only as unanimous on this article, a

common reader would be apt to infer that the later fathers are more cold or diffident, or divided upon it; whereas the reverse of this is true, and the more we descend from those earliest fathers the more strong and explicit we find their successors in attesting the perpetual succession and daily exertion of the same miraculous powers in their several ages; so that if the cause must be determined by *the unanimous consent of fathers*, we shall find as much reason to believe that those powers were continued even to the latest ages as to any other, how early and primitive soever, after the days of the apostles. But the same writer gives us two reasons why he does not choose to say anything upon the subject of their duration: 1st, because *there is not light enough in history to settle it;* 2ndly, because *the thing itself is of no concern to us.* As to his first reason, I am at a loss to conceive what further light a professed advocate of the primitive ages and fathers can possibly require in this case. For as far as the Church historians can illustrate or throw light upon anything, there is not a single point in all history so constantly, explicitly, and unanimously affirmed by them all, as the continual succession of those powers through all ages, from the earliest father who first mentions them down to the time of the Reformation. Which same succession is still further deduced by persons of the most eminent character for their probity, learning, and dignity in the Romish Church, to this very day. So that the only doubt which can remain with us is, whether the Church historians are to be trusted or not; for if any credit be due to them in the present case, it must reach either to all or to none; because the reason of believing them in any one age will be found to be of equal force in all, as far as it depends on the characters of the persons attesting, or the nature of the things attested." [1] In *terms* this and the whole of

[1] Preface to *Free Inquiry.*

Middleton's argument is so shaped as to avoid including in its scope the miracles of Scripture, which are mentioned throughout with eulogiums and acquiescence, and so as to make you doubt whether the author believed them or not. This is exactly one of the pretences which the young strong mind delights to tear down. It would argue, "This writer evidently *means* that the apostolic miracles have just as much evidence and no more than the popish or the patristic; and how strong"—for Middleton is a master of telling statement—"he shows that evidence to be! I won't give up the apostolic miracles, I cannot; yet I must believe what has as much of historical testimony in its favour. It is no *reductio ad absurdum* that we must go over to the Church of Rome; it is the most diffused of Christian creeds, the oldest of Christian Churches." And so the logic of the sceptic becomes, as often since, the most efficient instrument of the all-believing and all-determining Church.

The consternation of Gibbon's relatives seems to have been enormous. They cast about what to do. From the experience of Oxford, they perhaps thought that it would be useless to have recourse to the Anglican clergy; this resource had failed. So they took him to Mr. Mallet, a Deist, to see if he could do anything; but he did nothing. Their next step was nearly as extraordinary. They placed him at Lausanne, in the house of M. Pavilliard, a French Protestant minister. After the easy income, complete independence, and unlimited credit of an English undergraduate, he was thrown into a foreign country, deprived, as he says, by ignorance of the language, both of "speech and hearing,"—in the position of a schoolboy, with a small allowance of pocket-money, and without the Epicurean comforts on which he already set some value. He laments the "indispensable comfort of a servant," and the "sordid and uncleanly table of Madame Pavilliard". In our own day the watchful

sagacity of Cardinal Wiseman would hardly allow a promising convert of expectations and talents to remain unsolaced in so pitiful a situation; we should hear soothing offers of flight or succour, some insinuations of a Popish domestic and interesting repasts. But a hundred years ago, the attention of the Holy See was very little directed to our English youth, and Gibbon was left to endure his position.

It is curious that he made himself comfortable. Though destitute of external comforts which he did not despise, he found what was the greatest luxury to his disposition, steady study and regular tuition. His tutor was, of course, to convert him if he could; but as they had no language in common, there was the preliminary occupation of teaching French. During five years both tutor and pupil steadily exerted themselves to repair the defects of a neglected and ill-grounded education. We hear of the perusal of Terence, Virgil, Horace, and Tacitus. Cicero was translated into French, and translated back again into Latin. In both languages the pupil's progress was sound and good. From letters of his which still exist, it is clear that he then acquired the exact and steady knowledge of Latin of which he afterwards made so much use. His circumstances compelled him to master French. If his own letters are to be trusted, he would be an example of his own doctrine, that no one is thoroughly master of more than one language at a time; they read like the letters of a Frenchman trying and failing to write English. But perhaps there was a desire to magnify his continental progress, and towards the end of the time some wish to make his friends fear he was forgetting his own language.

Meantime the work of conversion was not forgotten. In some letters which are extant, M. Pavilliard celebrates the triumph of his logic. "*J'ai renversé*," says the pastor,

"*l'infaillibilité de l'Eglise; j'ai prouvé que jamais Saint Pierre n'a été chef des apôtres; que quand il l'aurait été, le pape n'est point son successeur; qu'il est douteux que Saint Pierre ait jamais été à Rome; mais supposé qu'il y ait été, il n'a pas été évêque de cette ville; que la transubstantiation est une invention humaine, et peu ancienne dans l'Eglise,*" and so on through the usual list of Protestant arguments. He magnifies a little Gibbon's strength of conviction, as it makes the success of his own logic seem more splendid; but states two curious things: first, that Gibbon at least *pretended* to believe in the Pretender, and what is more amazing still—all but incredible—that he fasted. Such was the youth of the Epicurean historian!

It is probable, however, that the skill of the Swiss pastor was not the really operating cause of the event. Perhaps experience shows that the converts which Rome has made, with the threat of unbelief and the weapons of the sceptic, have rarely been permanent or advantageous to her. It is at best but a dangerous logic to drive men to the edge and precipice of scepticism, in the hope that they will recoil in horror to the very interior of credulity. Possibly men may show their courage—they may vanquish the *argumentum ad terrorem*—they may not find scepticism so terrible. This last was Gibbon's case. A more insidious adversary than the Swiss theology was at hand to sap his Roman Catholic belief. Pavilliard had a fair French library—not ill stored in the recent publications of that age—of which he allowed his pupil the continual use. It was as impossible to open any of them and not come in contact with infidelity, as to come to England and not to see a green field. Scepticism is not so much a part of the French literature of that day as its animating spirit—its essence, its vitality. You can no more cut it out and separate it, than you can extract from Wordsworth his conception of nature, or from Swift his

common-sense. And it is of the subtlest kind. It has little in common with the rough disputation of the English deist, or the perplexing learning of the German theologian, but works with a tool more insinuating than either. It is, in truth, but the spirit of the world, which does not argue, but assumes; which does not so much elaborate, as hints; which does not examine, but suggests. With the traditions of the Church it contrasts traditions of its own; its technicalities are *bon sens*, *l'usage du monde*, *le fanatisme*, *l'enthousiasme;* to high hopes, noble sacrifices, awful lives, it opposes quiet ease, skilful comfort, placid sense, polished indifference. Old as transubstantiation may be, it is not older than Horace and Lucian. Lord Byron, in the well-known lines, has coupled the names of the two literary exiles on the Leman Lake. The page of Voltaire could not but remind Gibbon that the scepticism from which he had revolted was compatible with literary eminence and European fame—gave a piquancy to ordinary writing—was the very expression of caustic caution and gentlemanly calm.

The grave and erudite habits of Gibbon soon developed themselves. Independently of these abstruse theological disputations, he spent many hours daily—rising early and reading carefully—on classical and secular learning. He was not, however, wholly thus engrossed. There was in the neighbourhood of Lausanne a certain Mademoiselle Curchod, to whom he devoted some of his time. She seems to have been a morbidly rational lady; at least she had a grave taste. Gibbon could not have been a very enlivening lover; he was decidedly plain, and his predominating taste was for solid learning. But this was not all; she formed an attachment to M. Necker, afterwards the most slow of premiers, whose financial treatises can hardly have been agreeable even to a Genevese beauty. This was, however, at a later time. So far as appears, Gibbon was her first love. How extreme her

feelings were one does not know. Those of Gibbon can scarcely be supposed to have done him any harm. However, there was an intimacy, a flirtation, an engagement—when, as usual, it appeared that neither had any money. That the young lady should procure any seems to have been out of the question; and Gibbon, supposing that he might, wrote to his father. The reply was unfavourable. Gibbon's mother was dead; Mr. Gibbon senior was married again; and even in other circumstances would have been scarcely ready to encourage a romantic engagement to a lady with nothing. She spoke no English, too, and marriage with a person speaking only French is still regarded as a most unnatural event; forbidden, not indeed by the literal law of the Church, but by those higher instinctive principles of our nature, to which the bluntest own obedience. No father could be expected to violate at once pecuniary duties and patriotic principles. Mr. Gibbon senior forbade the match. The young lady does not seem to have been quite ready to relinquish all hope; but she had shown a grave taste, and fixed her affections on a sound and cold mind. "I sighed," narrates the historian, "as a lover; but I obeyed as a son." "I have seen," says M. Suard, "the letter in which Gibbon communicated to Mademoiselle Curchod the opposition of his father to their marriage. The first pages are tender and melancholy, as might be expected from an unhappy lover; the latter become by degrees calm and reasonable; and the letter concludes with these words: *C'est pourquoi, mademoiselle, j'ai l'honneur d'être votre très-humble et très-obéissant serviteur, Edward Gibbon.*" Her father died soon afterwards, and "she retired to Geneva, where, by teaching young ladies, she earned a hard subsistence for herself and her mother; but the tranquil disposition of her admirer preserved him from any romantic display of sympathy and fidelity. He continued to study various readings in Cicero,

as well as the passage of Hannibal over the Alps; and with those affectionate resources set sentiment at defiance. Yet thirty years later the lady, then the wife of the most conspicuous man in Europe, was able to suggest useful reflections to an aged bachelor, slightly dreaming of a superannuated marriage: "*Gardez-vous, monsieur, de former un de ces liens tardifs: le mariage qui rend heureux dans l'âge mûr, c'est celui qui fut contracté dans la jeunesse. Alors seulement la réunion est parfaite, les goûts se communiquent, les sentimens se répandent, les idées deviennent communes, les facultés intellectuelles se modèlent mutuellement. Toute la vie est double, et toute la vie est une prolongation de la jeunesse; car les impressions de l'âme commandent aux yeux, et la beauté qui n'est plus conserve encore son empire; mais pour vous, monsieur, dans toute la vigueur de la pensée, lorsque toute l'existence est décidée, l'on ne pourroit sans un miracle trouver une femme digne de vous; et une association d'un genre imparfait rappelle toujours la statue d'Horace, qui joint à une belle tête le corps d'un stupide poisson. Vous êtes marié avec la gloire.*" She was then a cultivated French lady, giving an account of the reception of the *Decline and Fall* at Paris, and expressing rather peculiar ideas on the style of Tacitus. The world had come round to her side, and she explains to her old lover rather well her happiness with M. Necker.

After living nearly five years at Lausanne, Gibbon returned to England. Continental residence has made a great alteration in many Englishmen; but few have undergone so complete a metamorphosis as Edward Gibbon. He left his own country a hot-brained and ill-taught youth, willing to sacrifice friends and expectations for a superstitious and half-known creed; he returned a cold and accomplished man, master of many accurate ideas, little likely to hazard any coin for any faith: already, it is

probable, inclined in secret to a cautious scepticism ; placing thereby, as it were, upon a system the frigid prudence and unventuring incredulity congenial to his character. His change of character changed his position among his relatives. His father, he says, met him as a friend ; and they continued thenceforth on a footing of "easy intimacy". Especially after the little affair of Mademoiselle Curchod, and the "very sensible view he took in that instance of the matrimonial relation," there can be little question that Gibbon was justly regarded as a most safe young man, singularly prone to large books, and a little too fond of French phrases and French ideas ; and yet with a great feeling of common-sense, and a wise preference of permanent money to transitory sentiment. His father allowed him a moderate, and but a moderate, income, which he husbanded with great care, and only voluntarily expended in the purchase and acquisition of serious volumes. He lived an externally idle but really studious life, varied by tours in France and Italy ; the toils of which, though not in description very formidable, a trifle tried a sedentary habit and somewhat corpulent body. The only English avocation which he engaged in was, oddly enough, war. It does not appear the most likely in this pacific country, nor does he seem exactly the man for *la grande guerre ;* but so it was ; and the fact is an example of a really Anglican invention. The English have discovered pacific war. We may not be able to kill people as well as the French, or fit out and feed distant armaments as neatly as they do ; but we are unrivalled at a quiet armament here at home which never kills anybody, and never wants to be sent anywhere. A "constitutional militia" is a beautiful example of the mild efficacy of civilisation, which can convert even the "great manslaying profession" (as Carlyle calls it) into a quiet and dining association. Into this force Gibbon was admitted ; and immediately, contrary to his anticipations,

and very much against his will, was called out for permanent duty. The hero of the corps was a certain dining Sir Thomas, who used at the end of each new bottle to announce with increasing joy how much soberer he had become. What his fellow-officers thought of Gibbon's French predilections and large volumes it is not difficult to conjecture; and he complains bitterly of the interruption to his studies. However, his easy composed nature soon made itself at home; his polished tact partially concealed from the "mess" his recondite pursuits, and he contrived to make the Hampshire armament of classical utility. "I read," he says, "the Analysis of Cæsar's Campaign in Africa. Every motion of that great general is laid open with a critical sagacity. A complete military history of his campaigns would do almost as much honour to M. Guichardt as to Cæsar. This finished the *Mémoires*, which gave me a much clearer notion of ancient tactics than I ever had before. Indeed, my own military knowledge was of some service to me, as I am well acquainted with the modern discipline and exercise of a battalion. So that though much inferior to M. Folard and M. Guichardt, who had seen service, I am a much better judge than Salmasius, Casaubon, or Lipsius; mere scholars, who perhaps had never seen a battalion under arms." [1]

The real occupation of Gibbon, as this quotation might suggest, was his reading; and this was of a peculiar sort. There are many kinds of readers, and each has a sort of perusal suitable to his kind. There is the voracious reader, like Dr. Johnson, who extracts with grasping appetite the large features, the mere essence of a trembling publication, and rejects the rest with contempt and disregard. There is the subtle reader, who pursues with fine attention the most imperceptible and delicate ramifications of an interesting topic, marks slight traits, notes changing manners, has a

[1] *Journal*, 23rd May, 1762.

keen eye for the character of his author, is minutely attentive to every prejudice and awake to every passion, watches syllables and waits on words, is alive to the light air of nice associations which float about every subject—the motes in the bright sunbeam—the delicate gradations of the passing shadows. There is the stupid reader, who prefers dull books —is generally to be known by his disregard of small books and English books, but likes masses in modern Latin, *Grævius de torpore mirabili; Horrificus de gravitate sapientiæ.* But Gibbon was not of any of these classes. He was what common people would call a matter-of-fact, and philosophers now-a-days a *positive* reader. No disciple of M. Comte could attend more strictly to precise and provable phenomena. His favourite points are those which can be weighed and measured. Like the dull reader, he had perhaps a preference for huge books in unknown tongues; but, on the other hand, he wished those books to contain real and accurate information. He liked the firm earth of positive knowledge. His fancy was not flexible enough for exquisite refinement, his imagination too slow for light and wandering literature; but he felt no love of dulness in itself, and had a prompt acumen for serious eloquence. This was his kind of reflection. "The author of the Adventurer, No. 127 (Mr. Joseph Warton, concealed under the signature of *Z*), concludes his ingenious parallel of the ancients and moderns by the following remark: 'That age will never again return, when a Pericles, after walking with Plato in a portico built by Phidias and painted by Apelles, might repair to hear a pleading of Demosthenes or a tragedy of Sophocles'. It will never return, because it never existed. Pericles (who died in the fourth year of the LXXXIXth Olympiad. ant. Ch. 429, Dio. Sic. l. xii. 46) was confessedly the patron of Phidias, and the contemporary of Sophocles; but he could enjoy no very great pleasure in the conversation of Plato,

who was born in the same year that he himself died (Diogenes Laertius in Platone, *v.* Stanley's *History of Philosophy,* p. 154). The error is still more extraordinary with regard to Apelles and Demosthenes, since both the painter and the orator survived Alexander the Great, whose death is above a century posterior to that of Pericles (in 323). And indeed, though Athens was the seat of every liberal art from the days of Themistocles to those of Demetrius Phalereus, yet no particular era will afford Mr. Warton the complete synchronism he seems to wish for; as tragedy was deprived of her famous triumvirate before the arts of philosophy and eloquence had attained the perfection which they soon after received at the hands of Plato, Aristotle, and Demosthenes."[1]

And wonderful is it for what Mr. Hallam calls "the languid students of our present age" to turn over the journal of his daily studies. It is true, it seems to have been revised by himself; and so great a narrator would group effectively facts with which he was so familiar; but allowing any discount (if we may use so mean a word) for the skilful art of the impressive historian, there will yet remain in the *Extraits de mon Journal* a wonderful monument of learned industry. You may open them anywhere. "*Dissertation on the Medal of Smyrna*, by M. de Boze: replete with erudition and taste; containing curious researches on the pre-eminence of the cities of Asia.—*Researches on the Polypus*, by Mr. Trembley. A new world: throwing light on physics, but darkening metaphysics.—Vegetius's *Institutions*. This writer on tactics has good general notions; but his particular account of the Roman discipline is deformed by

[1] This passage is to be found only in Lord Sheffield's five-volume edition of the *Miscellanies* (1814), being No. 30 of the *Index Expurgatorius* (vol. v.); the so-called "reprint" of 1837 omits this and other matter. (Forrest Morgan.)

confusion and anachronisms."[1] Or, "I this day began a very considerable task, which was to read Cluverius' *Italia Antiqua*, in two volumes folio, Leyden, 1624, Elzevirs";[2] and it appears he did read it as well as begin it, which is the point where most enterprising men would have failed. From the time of his residence at Lausanne his Latin scholarship had been sound and good, and his studies were directed to the illustration of the best Roman authors; but it is curious to find on 16th August, 1761, after his return to England, and when he was twenty-four years old, the following extract: "I have at last finished the *Iliad*. As I undertook it to improve myself in the Greek language, which I had totally neglected for some years past, and to which I never applied myself with a proper attention, I must give a reason why I began with Homer, and that contrary to Le Clerc's advice. I had two: 1st, As Homer is the most ancient Greek author (excepting perhaps Hesiod) who is now extant; and as he was not only the poet, but the lawgiver, the theologian, the historian, and the philosopher of the ancients, every succeeding writer is full of quotations from, or allusions to his writings, which it would be difficult to understand without a previous knowledge of them. In this situation, was it not natural to follow the ancients themselves, who always began their studies by the perusal of Homer? 2ndly, No writer ever treated such a variety of subjects. As every part of civil, military, or economical life is introduced into his poems, and as the simplicity of his age allowed him to call everything by its proper name, almost the whole compass of the Greek tongue is comprised in Homer. I have so far met with the success I hoped for, that I have acquired a great facility in reading the language, and treasured up a very great stock of words. What I have rather neglected is, the grammatical construction of them,

[1] 5th December, 1762. [2] 13th October, 1762.

and especially the many various inflexions of the verbs. In order to acquire that dry but necessary branch of knowledge, I propose bestowing some time every morning on the perusal of the *Greek Grammar of Port Royal*, as one of the best extant. I believe that I read nearly one-half of Homer like a mere schoolboy, not enough master of the words to elevate myself to the poetry. The remainder I read with a good deal of care and criticism, and made many observations on them. Some I have inserted here; for the rest I shall find a proper place. Upon the whole, I think that Homer's few faults (for some he certainly has) are lost in the variety of his beauties. I expected to have finished him long before. The delay was owing partly to the circumstances of my way of life and avocations, and partly to my own fault; for while every one looks on me as a prodigy of application, I know myself how strong a propensity I have to indolence." Posterity will confirm the contemporary theory that he was a "prodigy" of steady study. Those who know what the Greek language is, how much of the *Decline and Fall* depends on Greek authorities, how few errors the keen criticism of divines and scholars has been able to detect in his employment of them, will best appreciate the patient everyday labour which could alone repair the early neglect of so difficult an attainment.

It is odd how little Gibbon wrote, at least for the public, in early life. More than twenty-two years elapsed from his first return from Lausanne to the appearance of the first volume of his great work, and in that long interval his only important publication, if it can indeed be so called, was a French essay, *Sur l'Etude de la Littérature*, which contains some sensible remarks, and shows much regular reading; but which is on the whole a "conceivable treatise," and would be wholly forgotten if it had been written by any one else. It was little read in England, and must have been a

serious difficulty to his friends in the militia; but the Parisians read it, or said they had read it, which is more in their way, and the fame of being a French author was a great aid to him in foreign society. It flattered, indeed, the French *literati* more than any one can now fancy. The French had then the idea that it was uncivilised to speak any other language, and the notion of *writing* any other seemed quite a *bêtise*. By a miserable misfortune you might not know French, but at least you could conceal it assiduously; white paper anyhow might go unsoiled; posterity at least should not hear of such ignorance. The Parisian was to be the universal tongue. And it did not seem absurd, especially to those only slightly acquainted with foreign countries, that this might in part be so. Political eminence had given their language a diplomatic supremacy. No German literature existed as yet; Italy had ceased to produce important books. There was only England left to dispute the literary omnipotence; and such an attempt as Gibbon's was a peculiarly acceptable flattery, for it implied that her most cultivated men were beginning to abandon their own tongue, and to write like other nations in the cosmopolitan *lingua franca*. A few far-seeing observers, however, already contemplated the train of events which at the present day give such a preponderating influence to our own writers, and make it an arduous matter even to explain the conceivableness of the French ambition. Of all men living then or since, David Hume was the most likely from prejudice and habit to take an unfavourable view of English literary influence; he had more literary fame than he deserved in France, and less in England; he had much of the French neatness, he had but little of the English nature; yet his cold and discriminating intellect at once emancipated him from the sophistries which imposed on those less watchful. He wrote to Gibbon: "I have only one objection, derived from the language in which

it is written. Why do you compose in French, and carry faggots into the wood, as Horace says with regard to Romans who wrote in Greek? I grant that you have a like motive to those Romans, and adopt a language much more generally diffused than your native tongue; but have you not remarked the fate of those two ancient languages in the following ages? The Latin, though then less celebrated and confined to more narrow limits, has in some measure outlived the Greek, and is now more generally understood by men of letters. Let the French, therefore, triumph in the present diffusion of their tongue. Our solid and increasing establishments in America, where we need less dread the inundation of barbarians, promise a superior stability and duration to the English language."[1] The cool sceptic was correct. The great breeding people have gone out and multiplied; colonies in every clime attest our success; French is the *patois* of Europe; English is the language of the world.

Gibbon took the advice of his sagacious friend, and prepared himself for the composition of his great work in English. His studies were destined, however, to undergo an interruption. "Yesterday morning," he wrote to a friend, "about half an hour after seven, as I was destroying an army of barbarians, I heard a double rap at the door, and my friend Mr. Eliot was soon introduced. After some idle conversation, he told me that if I was desirous of being in Parliament, he had an independent seat very much at my service." The borough was Liskeard; and the epithet independent is, of course, ironical, Mr. Eliot being himself the constituency of that place. The offer was accepted, and one of the most learned of members of Parliament took his seat.

The political life of Gibbon is briefly described. He was a supporter of Lord North. That well-known statesman was, in the most exact sense, a representative man,—

[1] 24th October, 1767. Given in note to the *Memoirs*.

although representative of the class of persons most out of favour with the transcendental thinkers who invented this name. Germans deny it, but in every country common opinions are very common. Everywhere, there exists the comfortable mass; quiet, sagacious, short-sighted,—such as the Jews whom Rabshakeh tempted by their vine and their fig-tree; such as the English with their snug dining-room and after-dinner nap, domestic happiness and Bullo coal; sensible, solid men, without stretching irritable reason, but with a placid, supine instinct; without originality and without folly; judicious in their dealings, respected in the world; wanting little, sacrificing nothing; good-tempered people in a word, "caring for nothing until they are themselves hurt". Lord North was one of this class. You could hardly make him angry. "No doubt," he said, tapping his fat sides, "I am that odious thing a minister; and I believe other people wish they were so too." Profound people look deeply for the maxims of his policy; and these being on the surface, of course they fail to find them. He did, not what the mind, but what the *body* of the community wanted to have done; he appealed to the real people, the large English commonplace herd. His abilities were great; and with them he did what people with no abilities wished to do, and could not do. Lord Brougham has published the King's Letters to him, showing that which partial extracts had made known before, that Lord North was quite opposed to the war he was carrying on; was convinced it could not succeed; hardly, in fact, wished it might. Why did he carry it on? *Vox populi*, the voice of well-dressed men commanded it to be done; and he cheerfully sacrificed American people, who were nothing to him, to English, who were something, and a king, who was much. Gibbon was the very man to support such a ruler. His historical writings have given him a posthumous eminence; but in his own time he was doubtless thought a sen-

sible safe man, of ordinary thoughts and intelligible actions. To do him justice, he did not pretend to be a hero. "You know," he wrote to his friend Deyverdun, "*que je suis entré au parlement sans patriotisme, sans ambition, et que toutes mes vues se bornoient à la place commode et honnête d'un* lord of trade." "Wise in his generation" was written on his brow. He quietly and gently supported the policy of his time.

Even, however, amid the fatigue of parliamentary attendance,—the fatigue, in fact, of attending a nocturnal and oratorical club, where you met the best people, who could not speak, as well as a few of the worst, who *would*,—Gibbon's history made much progress. The first volume, a quarto, one-sixth of the whole, was published in the spring of 1776, and at once raised his fame to a high point. Ladies actually read it—read about Bœtica and Tarraconensis, the Roman legions and the tribunitian powers. Grave scholars wrote dreary commendations. "The first impression," he writes, "was exhausted in a few days; a second and a third edition were scarcely adequate to the demand; and my bookseller's property was twice invaded by the pirates of Dublin. My book was on every table"—tables must have been rather few in that age—"and almost on every toilette; the historian was crowned by the taste or fashion of the day; nor was the general voice disturbed by the barking of any profound critic." The noise penetrated deep into the unlearned classes. Mr. Sheridan, who never read anything "on principle," said that the crimes of Warren Hastings surpassed anything to be found in the "correct sentences of Tacitus or the *luminous* page of Gibbon".[1] Some one seems to have been struck with the jet of learning, and questioned the great wit. "I said," he replied, "*vo*luminous."

History, it is said, is of no use; at least a great critic,

[1] Speech on the trial.

who is understood to have in the press a very elaborate work in that kind,[1] not long since seemed to allege that writings of this sort did not establish a theory of the universe, and were therefore of no avail. But whatever may be the use of this sort of composition in itself and abstractedly, it is certainly of great use relatively and to literary men. Consider the position of a man of that species. He sits beside a library-fire, with nice white paper, a good pen, a capital style, every means of saying everything, but nothing to say; of course he is an able man; of course he has an active intellect, beside wonderful culture; but still one cannot always have original ideas. Every day cannot be an era; a train of new speculation very often will not be found; and how dull it is to make it your business to write, to stay by yourself in a room to write, and then to have nothing to say! It is dreary work mending seven pens, and waiting for a theory to "turn up". What a gain if something would happen! then one could describe it. Something has happened, and that something is history. On this account, since a sedate Greek discovered this plan for a grave immortality, a series of accomplished men have seldom been found wanting to derive a literary capital from their active and barbarous kindred. Perhaps when a Visigoth broke a head, he thought that that was all. Not so; he was making history; Gibbon has written it down.

The manner of writing history is as characteristic of the narrator as the actions are of the persons who are related to have performed them; often much more so. It may be generally defined as a view of one age taken by another; a picture of a series of men and women painted by one of another series. Of course, this definition seems to exclude contemporary history; but if we look into the matter carefully, is there such a thing? What are all the best and most

[1] Probably Carlyle and his *Frederick the Great* are meant.

noted works that claim the title—memoirs, scraps, materials —composed by men of like passions with the people they speak of, involved it may be in the same events, describing them with the partiality and narrowness of eager actors; or even worse, by men far apart in a monkish solitude, familiar with the lettuces of the convent-garden, but hearing only faint dim murmurs of the great transactions which they slowly jot down in the barren chronicle; these are not to be named in the same short breath, or included in the same narrow word, with the equable, poised, philosophic narrative of the retrospective historian. In the great histories there are two topics of interest—the man as a type of the age in which he lives,—the events and manners of the age he is describing; very often almost all the interest is the contrast of the two.

You should do everything, said Lord Chesterfield, in minuet time. It was in that time that Gibbon wrote his history, and such was the manner of the age. You fancy him in a suit of flowered velvet, with a bag and sword, wisely smiling, composedly rounding his periods. You seem to see the grave bows, the formal politeness, the finished deference. You perceive the minuetic action accompanying the words. "Give," it would say, "Augustus a chair: Zenobia, the humblest of your slaves: Odoacer, permit me to correct the defect in your attire." As the slap-dash sentences of a rushing critic express the hasty impatience of modern manners; so the deliberate emphasis, the slow acumen, the steady argument, the impressive narration bring before us what is now a tradition, the picture of the correct eighteenth-century gentleman, who never failed in a measured politeness, partly because it was due in propriety towards others, and partly because from his own dignity it was due most obviously to himself.

And not only is this true of style, but it may be extended

to other things also. There is no one of the many literary works produced in the eighteenth century more thoroughly characteristic of it than Gibbon's history. The special characteristic of that age is its clinging to the definite and palpable ; it had a taste beyond everything for what is called solid information. In literature the period may be defined as that in which authors had ceased to write for students, and had not begun to write for women. In the present day, no one can take up any book intended for general circulation, without clearly seeing that the writer supposes most of his readers will be ladies or young men ; and that in proportion to his judgment he is attending to their taste. Two or three hundred years ago books were written for professed and systematic students,—the class the Fellows of colleges were designed to be,—who used to go on studying them all their lives. Between these there was a time in which the more marked class of literary consumers were strong-headed, practical men. Education had not become so general, or so feminine, as to make the present style—what is called the "brilliant style"—at all necessary ; but there was enough culture to make the demand of common diffused persons more effectual than that of special and secluded scholars. A book-buying public had arisen of sensible men, who would not endure the awful folio style in which the schoolmen wrote. From peculiar causes, too, the business of that age was perhaps more free from the hurry and distraction which disable so many of our practical men now from reading. You accordingly see in the books of the last century what is called a masculine tone ; a firm, strong, perspicuous narration of matter of fact, a plain argument, a contempt for everything which distinct definite people cannot entirely and thoroughly comprehend. There is no more solid book in the world than Gibbon's history. Only consider the chronology. It begins before the year ONE and goes down to the year

1453, and is a schedule or series of schedules of important events during that time. Scarcely any fact deeply affecting European civilisation is wholly passed over, and the great majority of facts are elaborately recounted. Laws, dynasties, churches, barbarians, appear and disappear. Everything changes; the old world—the classical civilisation of form and definition—passes away, a new world of free spirit and inward growth emerges; between the two lies a mixed weltering interval of trouble and confusion, when everybody hates everybody, and the historical student leads a life of skirmishes, is oppressed with broils and feuds. All through this long period Gibbon's history goes with steady consistent pace; like a Roman legion through a troubled country—*hæret pede pes;* up hill and down hill, through marsh and thicket, through Goth or Parthian—the firm, defined array passes forward—a type of order, and an emblem of civilisation. Whatever may be the defects of Gibbon's history, none can deny him a proud precision and a style in marching order.

Another characteristic of the eighteenth century is its taste for dignified pageantry. What an existence was that of Versailles! How gravely admirable to see the *grand monarque* shaved, and dressed, and powdered; to look on and watch a great man carefully amusing himself with dreary trifles. Or do we not even now possess an invention of that age—the great eighteenth-century footman, still in the costume of his era, with dignity and powder, vast calves and noble mien? What a world it must have been when all men looked like that! Go and gaze with rapture at the footboard of a carriage, and say, Who would not obey a premier with such an air? Grave, tranquil, decorous pageantry is a part, as it were, of the essence of the last age. There is nothing more characteristic of Gibbon. A kind of pomp pervades him. He is never out of livery. He ever selects for narration those themes which look most like a

levee: grave chamberlains seem to stand throughout; life is a vast ceremony, the historian at once the dignitary and the scribe.

The very language of Gibbon shows these qualities. Its majestic march has been the admiration, its rather pompous cadence the sport, of all perusers. It has the greatest merit of an historical style: it is always going on; you feel no doubt of its continuing in motion. Many narrators of the reflective class, Sir Archibald Alison for example, fail in this: your constant feeling is, "Ah! he has pulled up; he is going to be profound; he never will go on again". Gibbon's reflections connect the events; they are not sermons between them. But, notwithstanding, the manner of the *Decline and Fall* is the last which should be recommended for strict imitation. It is not a style in which you can tell the truth. A monotonous writer is suited only to monotonous matter. Truth is of various kinds—grave, solemn, dignified, petty, low, ordinary; and an historian who has to tell the truth must be able to tell what is vulgar as well as what is great, what is little as well as what is amazing. Gibbon is at fault here. He *cannot* mention Asia *Minor*. The petty order of sublunary matters; the common gross existence of ordinary people; the necessary littlenesses of necessary life, are little suited to his sublime narrative. Men on the *Times* feel this acutely; it is most difficult at first to say many things in the huge imperial manner. And after all you cannot tell everything. "How, sir," asked a reviewer of Sydney Smith's life, "do you say a 'good fellow' in print?" "Mr. ——," replied the editor, "you should not say it at all." Gibbon was aware of this rule; he omits what does not suit him; and the consequence is, that though he has selected the most various of historical topics, he scarcely gives you an idea of variety. The ages change, but the varnish of the narration is the same.

It is not unconnected with this fault that Gibbon gives us but an indifferent description of individual character. People seem a good deal alike. The cautious scepticism of his cold intellect, which disinclined him to every extreme, depreciates great virtues and extenuates vices; and we are left with a tame neutral character, capable of nothing extraordinary,—hateful, as the saying is, "both to God and to the enemies of God".

A great point in favour of Gibbon is the existence of his history. Some great historians seem likely to fail here. A good judge was asked which he preferred, Macaulay's *History of England* or Lord Mahon's. "Why," he replied, "you observe Lord Mahon has written his history; and by what I see Macaulay's will be written not only for, but *among* posterity." Practical people have little idea of the practical ability required to write a large book, and especially a large history. Long before you get to the pen, there is an immensity of pure business; heaps of material are strewn everywhere; but they lie in disorder, unread, uncatalogued, unknown. It seems a dreary waste of life to be analysing, indexing, extracting words and passages, in which one per cent. of the contents are interesting, and not half of that percentage will after all appear in the flowing narrative. As an accountant takes up a bankrupt's books filled with confused statements of ephemeral events, the disorderly record of unprofitable speculations, and charges this to that head, and that to this,—estimates earnings, specifies expenses, demonstrates failures; so the great narrator, going over the scattered annalists of extinct ages, groups and divides, notes and combines, until from a crude mass of darkened fragments, there emerges a clear narrative, a concise account of the result and upshot of the whole. In this art Gibbon was a master. The laborious research of German scholarship, the keen eye of theological zeal, a

steady criticism of eighty years, have found few faults of detail. The account has been worked right, the proper authorities consulted, an accurate judgment formed, the most telling incidents selected. Perhaps experience shows that there is something English in this talent. The Germans are more elaborate in single monographs; but they seem to want the business ability to work out a complicated narrative, to combine a long whole. The French are neat enough, and their style is very quick; but then it is difficult to believe their facts; the account on its face seems too plain, and no true Parisian ever was an antiquary. The great classical histories published in this country in our own time show that the talent is by no means extinct; and they likewise show, what is also evident, that this kind of composition is easier with respect to ancient than with respect to modern times. The barbarians burned the books; and though all the historians abuse them for it, it is quite evident that in their hearts they are greatly rejoiced. If the books had existed, they would have had to read them. Macaulay has to peruse every book printed with long fs; and it is no use after all; somebody will find some stupid MS., an old account-book of an "ingenious gentleman," and with five entries therein destroy a whole hypothesis. But Gibbon was exempt from this; he could count the books the efficient Goths bequeathed; and when he had mastered them he might pause. Still, it was no light matter, as any one who looks at the books—awful folios in the grave Bodleian—will most certainly credit and believe. And he did it all himself; he never showed his book to any friend, or asked any one to help him in the accumulating work, not even in the correction of the press. "Not a sheet," he says, "has been seen by any human eyes, excepting those of the author and printer; the faults and the merits are exclusively my own." And he wrote most of it with one pen, which must certainly have grown erudite towards the end.

The nature of his authorities clearly shows what the nature of Gibbon's work is. History may be roughly divided into universal and particular; the first being the narrative of events affecting the whole human race, at least the main historical nations, the narrative of whose fortunes is the story of civilisation; and the latter being the relation of events relating to one or a few particular nations only. Universal history, it is evident, comprises great areas of space and long periods of time; you cannot have a series of events visibly operating on all great nations without time for their gradual operation, and without tracking them in succession through the various regions of their power. There is no instantaneous transmission in historical causation; a long interval is required for universal effects. It follows, that universal history necessarily partakes of the character of a summary. You cannot recount the cumbrous annals of long epochs without condensation, selection, and omission; the narrative, when shortened within the needful limits, becomes concise and general. What it gains in time, according to the mechanical phrase, it loses in power. The particular history, confined within narrow limits, can show us the whole contents of these limits, explain its features of human interest, recount in graphic detail all its interesting transactions, touch the human heart with the power of passion, instruct the mind with patient instances of accurate wisdom. The universal is confined to a dry enumeration of superficial transactions; no action can have all its details; the canvas is so crowded that no figure has room to display itself effectively. From the nature of the subject, Gibbon's history is of the latter class; the sweep of the narrative is so wide; the decline and fall of the Roman Empire being in some sense the most universal event which has ever happened,—being, that is, the historical incident which most affected all civilised men, and the very existence

and form of civilisation itself,—it is evident that we must look rather for a comprehensive generality than a telling minuteness of delineation. The history of a thousand years does not admit the pictorial detail which a Scott or a Macaulay can accumulate on the history of a hundred. Gibbon has done his best to avoid the dryness natural to such an attempt. He inserts as much detail as his limits will permit; selects for more full description striking people and striking transactions; brings together at a single view all that relates to single topics; above all, by a regular advance of narration, never ceases to imply the regular progress of events and the steady course of time. None can deny the magnitude of such an effort. After all, however, these are merits of what is technically termed composition, and are analogous to those excellences in painting or sculpture that are more respected by artists than appreciated by the public at large. The fame of Gibbon is highest among writers; those especially who have studied for years particular periods included in his theme (and how many those are; for in the East and West he has set his mark on all that is great for ten centuries!) acutely feel and admiringly observe how difficult it would be to say so much, and leave so little untouched; to compress so many telling points; to present in so few words so apt and embracing a narrative of the whole. But the mere unsophisticated reader scarcely appreciates this; he is rather awed than delighted; or rather, perhaps, he appreciates it for a little while, then is tired by the roll and glare; then, on any chance—the creaking of an organ, or the stirring of a mouse—in time of temptation he falls away. It has been said, the way to answer all objections to Milton is to take down the book and read him; the way to reverence Gibbon is not to read him at all, but look at him, from outside, in the bookcase, and think how much there is within; what a course of events, what a muster-roll

of names, what a steady, solemn sound! You will not like to take the book down; but you will think how much you could be delighted if you would.

It may be well, though it can be only in the most cursory manner, to examine the respective treatment of the various elements in this vast whole. The *History of the Decline and Fall* may be roughly and imperfectly divided into the picture of the Roman Empire—the narrative of barbarian incursions —the story of Constantinople: and some few words may be hastily said on each.

The picture—for so, from its apparent stability when contrasted with the fluctuating character of the later period, we may call it—which Gibbon has drawn of the united empire has immense merit. The organisation of the imperial system is admirably dwelt on; the manner in which the old republican institutions were apparently retained, but really altered, is compendiously explained; the mode in which the imperial will was transmitted to and carried out in remote provinces is distinctly displayed. But though the mechanism is admirably delineated, the dynamical principle, the original impulse is not made clear. You never feel you are reading about the Romans. Yet no one denies their character to be most marked. Poets and orators have striven for the expression of it.

Macaulay has been similarly criticised; it has been said, that notwithstanding his great dramatic power, and wonderful felicity in the selection of events on which to exert it, he yet never makes us feel that we are reading about Englishmen. The coarse clay of our English nature *cannot* be represented in so fine a style. In the same way, and to a much greater extent (for this is perhaps an unthankful criticism, if we compare Macaulay's description of any body with that of any other historian), Gibbon is chargeable with neither expressing nor feeling the essence of the people con-

cerning whom he is writing. There was, in truth, in the Roman people a warlike fanaticism, a puritanical essence, an interior, latent, restrained, enthusiastic religion, which was utterly alien to the cold scepticism of the narrator. Of course he was conscious of it. He indistinctly felt that at least there was something he did not like; but he could not realise or sympathise with it without a change of heart and nature. The old pagan has a sympathy with the religion of enthusiasm far above the reach of the modern Epicurean.

It may indeed be said, on behalf of Gibbon, that the old Roman character was in its decay, and that only such slight traces of it were remaining in the age of Augustus and the Antonines, that it is no particular defect in him to leave it unnoticed. Yet, though the intensity of its nobler peculiarities was on the wane, many a vestige would perhaps have been apparent to so learned an eye, if his temperament and disposition had been prone to seize upon and search for them. Nor is there any adequate appreciation of the compensating element, of the force which really held society together, of the fresh air of the Illyrian hills, of that army which, evermore recruited from northern and rugged populations, doubtless brought into the very centre of a degraded society the healthy simplicity of a vital, if barbarous religion.

It is no wonder that such a mind should have looked with displeasure on primitive Christianity. The whole of his treatment of that topic has been discussed by many pens, and three generations of ecclesiastical scholars have illustrated it with their emendations. Yet, if we turn over this, the latest and most elaborate edition, containing all the important criticisms of Milman and of Guizot, we shall be surprised to find how few instances of definite exact error such a scrutiny has been able to find out. As Paley, with his strong sagacity, at once remarked, the subtle error rather lies hid in the sinuous folds than is directly apparent on the surface

of the polished style. Who, said the shrewd archdeacon, can refute a sneer? And yet even this is scarcely the exact truth. The objection of Gibbon is, in fact, an objection rather to religion than to Christianity; as has been said, he did not appreciate, and could not describe, the most inward form of pagan piety; he objected to Christianity because it was the intensest of religions. We do not mean by this to charge Gibbon with any denial of, any overt distinct disbelief in, the existence of a supernatural Being. This would be very unjust; his cold composed mind had nothing in common with the Jacobinical outbreak of the next generation. He was no doubt a theist after the fashion of natural theology; nor was he devoid of more than scientific feeling. All constituted authorities struck him with emotion, all ancient ones with awe. If the Roman Empire had descended to his time, how much he would have reverenced it! He had doubtless a great respect for the "First Cause"; it had many titles to approbation; "it was not conspicuous," he would have said, "but it was potent". A sensitive decorum revolted from the jar of atheistic disputation. We have already described him more than enough. A sensible middle-aged man in political life; a bachelor, not himself gay, but living with gay men; equable and secular; cautious in his habits, tolerant in his creed, as Porson said, "never failing in natural feeling, except when women were to be ravished and Christians to be martyred". His writings are in character. The essence of the far-famed fifteenth and sixteenth chapters is, in truth, but a description of unworldly events in the tone of this world, of awful facts in unmoved voice, of truths of the heart in the language of the eyes. The wary sceptic has not even committed himself to definite doubts. These celebrated chapters were in the first manuscript much longer, and were gradually reduced to their present size by excision and compression. Who can doubt

that in their first form they were a clear, or comparatively clear, expression of exact opinions on the Christian history, and that it was by a subsequent and elaborate process that they were reduced to their present and insidious obscurity? The toil has been effectual. "Divest," says Dean Milman of the introduction to the fifteenth chapter, "this whole passage of the latent sarcasm betrayed by the whole of the subsequent dissertation, and it might commence a Christian history, written in the most Christian spirit of candour."[1]

It is not for us here to go into any disquisition as to the comparative influence of the five earthly causes, to whose secondary operation the specious historian ascribes the progress of Christianity. Weariness and disinclination forbid. There can be no question that the polity of the Church, and the zeal of the converts, and other such things, did most materially conduce to the progress of the Gospel. But few will now attribute to these much of the effect. The real cause is the heaving of the mind after the truth. Troubled with the perplexities of time, weary with the vexation of ages, the spiritual faculty of man turns to the truth as the child turns to its mother. The thirst of the soul was to be satisfied, the deep torture of the spirit to have rest. There was an appeal to those—

> "High instincts, before which our mortal nature
> Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised".[2]

The mind of man has an appetite for the truth.

> "Hence, in a season of calm weather,
> Though inland far we be,
> Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
> Which brought us hither,—
> Can in a moment travel thither,
> And see the children sport upon the shore,
> And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore."[3]

[1] Preface to his edition of the *Decline and Fall.*

[2] Wordsworth: "Intimations of Immortality," ix.

[3] *Ibid.*

All this was not exactly in Gibbon's way, and he does not seem to have been able to conceive that it was in any one else's. Why his chapters had given offence he could hardly make out. It actually seems that he hardly thought that other people believed more than he did. "We may be well assured," says he, of a sceptic of antiquity, "that a writer conversant with the world would never have ventured to expose the gods of his country to public ridicule, had they not been already the objects of secret contempt among the polished and enlightened orders of society." [1] "Had I," he says of himself, "believed that the majority of English readers were so fondly attached even to the name and shadow of Christianity, had I foreseen that the pious, the timid, and the prudent would feel, or would affect to feel, with such exquisite sensibility, — I might perhaps have softened the two invidious chapters, which would create many enemies and conciliate few friends." [2] The state of belief at that time is a very large subject; but it is probable that in the cultivated cosmopolitan classes the continental scepticism was very rife; that among the hard-headed classes the rough spirit of English Deism had made progress. Though the mass of the people doubtless believed much as they now believe, yet the entire upper class was lazy and corrupt, and there is truth in the picture of the modern divine: "The thermometer of the Church of England sunk to its lowest point in the first thirty years of the reign of George III. . . . In their preaching, nineteen clergymen out of twenty carefully abstained from dwelling upon Christian doctrines. Such topics exposed the preacher to the charge of fanaticism. Even the calm and sober Crabbe, who certainly never erred from excess of zeal, was stigmatised in those days as a Methodist, because he introduced into his sermons the notion of future reward and punishment. An orthodox clergyman

[1] *Decline and Fall*, chap. ii., *in re* Lulian. [2] *Memoirs.*

(they said) should be content to show his people the worldly advantage of good conduct, and to leave heaven and hell to the ranters. Nor can we wonder that such should have been the notions of country parsons, when, even by those who passed for the supreme arbiters of orthodoxy and taste, the vapid rhetoric of Blair was thought the highest standard of Christian exhortation."[1] It is among the excuses for Gibbon that he lived in such a world.

There are slight palliations also in the notions then prevalent of the primitive Church. There was the Anglican theory, that it was a *via media*, the most correct of periods, that its belief is to be the standard, its institutions the model, its practice the test of subsequent ages. There was the notion, not formally drawn out, but diffused through and implied in a hundred books of evidence—a notion in opposition to every probability, and utterly at variance with the New Testament—that the first converts were sober, hard-headed, cultivated inquirers,—Watsons, Paleys, Priestleys, on a small scale; weighing evidence, analysing facts, suggesting doubts, dwelling on distinctions, cold in their dispositions, moderate in their morals,—cautious in their creed. We now know that these were not they of whom the world was not worthy. It is ascertained that the times of the first Church were times of excitement; that great ideas falling on a mingled world were distorted by an untrained intellect, even in the moment in which they were received by a yearning heart; that strange confused beliefs, Millennarianism, Gnosticism, Ebionitism, were accepted, not merely by outlying obscure heretics, but in a measure, half-and-half, one notion more by one man, another more by his neighbour, confusedly and mixedly by the mass of Christians; that the appeal was not to the questioning, thinking under-

[1] "Church Parties," *Edinburgh Review* for October, 1853; by W. J. Conybeare.

standing, but to unheeding, all-venturing emotion; to that lower class "from whom faiths ascend," and not to the cultivated and exquisite class by whom they are criticised; that fervid men never embraced a more exclusive creed. You can say nothing favourable of the first Christians, except that they *were* Christians. We find no "form nor comeliness" in them; no intellectual accomplishments, no caution in action, no discretion in understanding. There is no admirable quality except that, with whatever distortion, or confusion, or singularity, they at once accepted the great clear outline of belief in which to this day we live, move, and have our being. The offence of Gibbon is his disinclination to this simple essence; his excuse, the historical errors then prevalent as to the primitive Christians, the real defects so natural in their position, the false merits ascribed to them by writers who from one reason or another desired to treat them as "an authority".

On the whole, therefore, it may be said of the first, and in some sense the most important, part of Gibbon's work, that though he has given an elaborate outline of the framework of society, and described its detail with pomp and accuracy, yet that he has not comprehended or delineated its nobler essence, pagan or Christian. Nor perhaps was it to be expected that he should, for he inadequately comprehended the dangers of the time; he thought it the happiest period the world has ever known; he would not have comprehended the remark: "To see the old world in its worst estate we turn to the age of the satirist and of Tacitus, when all the different streams of evil coming from east, west, north, south, the vices of barbarism and the vices of civilisation, remnants of ancient cults and the latest refinements of luxury and impurity, met and mingled on the banks of the Tiber. What could have been the state of society when Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, Domitian, Helioga-

balus, were the rulers of the world? To a good man we should imagine that death itself would be more tolerable than the sight of such things coming upon the earth."[1] So deep an ethical sensibility was not to be expected in the first century; nor is it strange when, after seventeen hundred years, we do not find it in their historian.

Space has failed us, and we must be unmeaningly brief. The second head of Gibbon's history—the narrative of the barbarian invasions—has been recently criticised, on the ground that he scarcely enough explains the gradual but unceasing and inevitable manner in which the outer barbarians were affected by and assimilated to the civilisation of Rome. Mr. Congreve[2] has well observed, that the impression which Gibbon's narrative is insensibly calculated to convey is, that there was little or no change in the state of the Germanic tribes between the time of Tacitus and the final invasion of the empire—a conclusion which is obviously incredible. To the general reader there will perhaps seem some indistinctness in this part of the work, nor is a free, confused barbarism a congenial subject for an imposing and orderly pencil. He succeeds better in the delineation of the riding monarchies, if we may so term them,—of the equestrian courts of Attila or Timour, in which the great scale, the concentrated power, the very enormity of the barbarism, give, so to speak, a shape to unshapeliness; impart, that is, a horrid dignity to horse-flesh and mare's milk, an imposing oneness to the vast materials of a crude barbarity. It is needless to say that no one would search Gibbon for an explanation of the reasons or feelings by which the northern tribes were induced to accept Christianity.

It is on the story of Constantinople that the popularity

[1] Jowett: "Epistles of St. Paul, chap. i. of Romans," *State of the Ancient World.*

[2] *Lectures on the Roman Empire of the West.*

of Gibbon rests. The vast extent of the topic; the many splendid episodes it contains; its epic unity from the moment of the far-seeing selection of the city by Constantine to its last fall; its position as a link between Europe and Asia; its continuous history; the knowledge that through all that time it was, as now, a diadem by the water-side, a lure to be snatched by the wistful barbarian, a marvel to the West, a prize for the North and for the East;—these, and such as these ideas, are congenial topics to a style of pomp and grandeur. The East seems to require to be treated with a magnificence unsuitable to a colder soil. The nature of the events, too, is suitable to Gibbon's cursory, imposing manner. It is the history of a form of civilisation, but without the power thereof; a show of splendour and vigour, but without bold life or interior reality. What an opportunity for an historian who loved the imposing pageantry and disliked the purer essence of existence! There were here neither bluff barbarians nor simple saints; there was nothing admitting of particular accumulated detail; we do not wish to know the interior of the stage; the imposing movements are all which should be seized. Some of the features, too, are curious in relation to those of the historian's life: the clear accounts of the theological controversies, followed out with an appreciative minuteness so rare in a sceptic, are not disconnected with his early conversion to the scholastic Church; the brilliancy of the narrative reminds us of his enthusiasm for Arabic and the East; the minute description of a licentious epoch evinces the habit of a mind which, not being bold enough for the practice of license, took a pleasure in following its theory. There is no subject which combines so much of unity with so much of variety.

It is evident, therefore, where Gibbon's rank as an historian must finally stand. He cannot be numbered among the great painters of human nature, for he has no sympathy

with the heart and passions of our race; he has no place among the felicitous describers of detailed life, for his subject was too vast for minute painting, and his style too uniform for a shifting scene. But he is entitled to a high—perhaps to a first place—among the orderly narrators of great events; the composed expositors of universal history; the tranquil artists who have endeavoured to diffuse a cold polish over the warm passions and desultory fortunes of mankind.

The life of Gibbon after the publication of his great work was not very complicated. During its composition he had withdrawn from Parliament and London to the studious retirement of Lausanne. Much eloquence has been expended on this voluntary exile, and it has been ascribed to the best and most profound motives. It is indeed certain that he liked a lettered solitude, preferred easy continental society, was not quite insensible to the charm of scenery, had a pleasure in returning to the haunts of his youth. Prosaic and pure history, however, must explain that he went abroad to *save*. Lord North had gone out of power. Mr. Burke, the Cobden of that era, had procured the abolition of the Lords of Trade; the private income of Gibbon was not equal to his notion of a bachelor London life. The same sum was, however, a fortune at Lausanne. Most things, he acknowledged, were as dear; but then he had not to buy so many things. Eight hundred a year placed him high in the social scale of the place. The inhabitants were gratified that a man of European reputation had selected their out-of-the-way town for the shrine of his fame; he lived pleasantly and easily among easy, pleasant people; a gentle hum of local admiration gradually arose, which yet lingers on the lips of erudite *laquais de place*. He still retains a fame unaccorded to any other historian; they speak of the "hôtel Gibbon": there never was even an *estaminet* Tacitus, or a *café* Thucydides.

This agreeable scene, like many other agreeable scenes, was broken by a great thunderclap. The French revolution has disgusted many people; but perhaps it has never disgusted any one more than Gibbon. He had swept and garnished everything about him. Externally he had made a neat little hermitage in a gentle, social place; internally he had polished up a still theory of life, sufficient for the guidance of a cold and polished man. Everything seemed to be tranquil with him; the rigid must admit his decorum; the lax would not accuse him of rigour; he was of the world, and an elegant society naturally loved its own. On a sudden the hermitage was disturbed. No place was too calm for that excitement; scarcely any too distant for that uproar. The French war was a war of opinion, entering households, disturbing villages, dividing quiet friends. The Swiss took some of the infection. There was a not unnatural discord between the people of the Pays de Vaud and their masters the people of Berne. The letters of Gibbon are filled with invectives on the "Gallic barbarians" and panegyrics on Mr. Burke; military details, too, begin to abound—the peace of his retirement was at an end. It was an additional aggravation that the Parisians should do such things. It would not have seemed unnatural that northern barbarians—English, or other uncivilised nations—should break forth in rough riot or cruel license; but that the people of the most civilised of all capitals, speaking the sole dialect of polished life, enlightened with all the enlightenment then known, should be guilty of excesses unparalleled, unwitnessed, unheard of, was a vexing trial to one who had admired them for many years. The internal creed and belief of Gibbon was as much attacked by all this as were his external circumstances. He had spent his time, his life, his energy, in putting a polished gloss on human tumult, a sneering gloss on human piety; on a sudden human passion broke forth—the cold and

polished world seemed to meet its end; the thin superficies of civilisation was torn asunder; the fountains of the great deep seemed opened; impiety to meet its end; the foundations of the earth were out of course.

We now, after long familiarity and in much ignorance, can hardly read the history of those years without horror: what an effect must they have produced on those whose minds were fresh, and who knew the people killed! "Never," Gibbon wrote to an English nobleman, "did a revolution affect to such a degree the private existence of such numbers of the first people of a great country. Your examples of misery I could easily match with similar examples in this country and neighbourhood, and our sympathy is the deeper, as we do not possess, like you, the means of alleviating in some measure the misfortunes of the fugitives."[1] It violently affected his views of English politics. He before had a tendency, in consideration of his cosmopolitan cultivation, to treat them as local littlenesses, parish squabbles; but now his interest was keen and eager. "But," he says, "in this rage against slavery, in the numerous petitions against the slave-trade, was there no leaven of new democratical principles? no wild ideas of the rights and natural equality of man? It is these I fear. Some articles in newspapers, some pamphlets of the year, the Jockey Club, have fallen into my hands. I do not infer much from such publications; yet I have never known them of so black and malignant a cast. I shuddered at Grey's motion; disliked the half-support of Fox, admired the firmness of Pitt's declaration, and excused the usual intemperance of Burke. Surely such men as ——, ——, ——, have talents for mischief. I see a club of reform which contains some respectable names. Inform me of the professions, the principles, the plans, the resources of these reformers. Will

[1] To Lord Sheffield, 10th November, 1792.

they heat the minds of the people? Does the French democracy gain no ground? Will the bulk of your party stand firm to their own interest and that of their country? Will you not take some active measures to declare your sound opinions, and separate yourselves from your rotten members? If you allow them to perplex Government, if you trifle with this solemn business, if you do not resist the spirit of innovation in the first attempt, if you admit the smallest and most specious change in our parliamentary system, you are lost. You will be driven from one step to another; from principles just in theory to consequences most pernicious in practice; and your first concession will be productive of every subsequent mischief, for which you will be answerable to your country and to posterity. Do not suffer yourselves to be lulled into a false security; remember the proud fabric of the French monarchy. Not four years ago it stood founded, as it might seem, on the rock of time, force, and opinion; supported by the triple aristocracy of the Church, the nobility, and the Parliaments. They are crumbled into dust; they are vanished from the earth. If this tremendous warning has no effect on the men of property in England; if it does not open every eye, and raise every arm,—you will deserve your fate. If I am too precipitate, enlighten; if I am too desponding, encourage me. My pen has run into this argument; for, as much a foreigner as you think me, on this momentous subject I feel myself an Englishman."[1]

The truth clearly is, that he had arrived at the conclusion that he was the sort of person a populace kill. People wonder a great deal why very many of the victims of the French revolution were particularly selected; the Marquis de Custine, especially, cannot divine why they executed *his* father. The historians cannot show that they committed

[1] To Lord Sheffield, 30th May, 1792.

any particular crimes; the marquises and marchionesses seem very inoffensive. The fact evidently is, that they were killed for being polite. The world felt itself unworthy of them. There were so many bows, such regular smiles, such calm superior condescension,—could a mob be asked to endure it? Have we not all known a precise, formal, patronising old gentleman—bland, imposing, something like Gibbon? Have we not suffered from his dignified attentions? If *we* had been on the Committee of Public Safety, can we doubt what would have been the fate of that man? Just so wrath and envy destroyed in France an upper-class world.

After his return to England, Gibbon did not do much or live long. He completed his *Memoirs*, the most imposing of domestic narratives, the model of dignified detail. As we said before, if the Roman Empire *had* written about itself, this was how it would have done so. He planned some other works, but executed none; judiciously observing that building castles in the air was more agreeable than building them on the ground. His career was, however, drawing to an end. Earthly dignity had its limits, even the dignity of an historian. He had long been stout; and now symptoms of dropsy began to appear. After a short interval, he died on the 16th of January, 1794. We have sketched his character, and have no more to say. After all, what is our criticism worth? It only fulfils his aspiration, "that a hundred years hence I may still continue to be abused".[1]

[1] *Memoirs.*

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.[1]

(1856.)

After the long biography of Moore, it is half a comfort to think of a poet as to whom our information is but scanty. The few intimates of Shelley seem inclined to go to their graves without telling in accurate detail the curious circumstances of his life. We are left to be content with vain "prefaces" and the circumstantial details of a remarkable blunderer. We know something, however; — we know enough to check our inferences from his writings; in some moods it is pleasant not to have them disturbed by long volumes of memoirs and anecdotes.

One peculiarity of Shelley's writing makes it natural that at times we should not care to have, that at times we should wish for, a full biography. No writer has left so clear an image of himself in his writings; when we remember them as a whole, we seem to want no more. No writer, on the other hand, has left so many little allusions which we should be glad to have explained, which the patient patriarch would not perhaps have endured that any one should comprehend while he did not. The reason is, that Shelley has combined the use of the two great modes by which writers leave with

[1] *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Edited by Mrs. Shelley. 1853.

Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations, and Fragments. By Percy Bysshe Shelley. Edited by Mrs. Shelley. 1854.

The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley. By Captain Thomas Medwin. 1847.

their readers the image of themselves. There is the art of self-delineation. Some authors try in imagination to get outside themselves—to contemplate their character as a fact, and to describe it and the movement of their own actions as external forms and images. Scarcely any one has done this as often as Shelley. There is hardly one of his longer works which does not contain a finished picture of himself in some point or under some circumstances. Again, some writers, almost or quite unconsciously, by a special instinct of style, give an idea of themselves. This is not peculiar to literary men; it is quite as remarkable among men of action. There are people in the world who cannot write the commonest letter on the commonest affair of business without giving a just idea of themselves. The Duke of Wellington is an example which at once occurs of this. You may read a despatch of his about bullocks and horseshoe-nails, and yet you will feel an interest—a great interest, because somehow among the words seems to lurk the mind of a great general. Shelley has this peculiarity also. Every line of his has a personal impress, an unconscious inimitable manner. And the two modes in which he gives an idea of himself concur. In every delineation we see the same simple intense being. As mythology found a Naiad in the course of every limpid stream, so through each eager line our fancy sees the same panting image of sculptured purity.

Shelley is probably the most remarkable instance of the pure impulsive character,—to comprehend which requires a little detail. Some men are born under the law; their whole life is a continued struggle between the lower principles of their nature and the higher. These are what are called men of principle; each of their best actions is a distinct choice between conflicting motives. One propension would bear them here; another there; a third would hold them still: into the midst the living will goes forth in its power, and

selects whichever it holds to be best. The habitual supremacy of conscience in such men gives them an idea that they only exert their will when they do right; when they do wrong they seem to "let their nature go"; they say that "they are hurried away": but, in fact, there is commonly an act of will in both cases;—only it is weaker when they act ill, because in passably good men, if the better principles are reasonably strong, they conquer; it is only when very faint that they are vanquished. Yet the case is evidently not always so; sometimes the wrong principle is of itself and of set purpose definitively chosen: the better one is consciously put down. The very existence of divided natures is a conflict. This is no new description of human nature. For eighteen hundred years Christendom has been amazed at the description in St. Paul of the law of his members warring against the law of his mind. Expressions most unlike in language, but not dissimilar in meaning, are to be found in some of the most familiar passages of Aristotle.

In extreme contrast to this is the nature which has no struggle. It is possible to conceive a character in which but one impulse is ever felt—in which the whole being, as with a single breeze, is carried in a single direction. The only exercise of the will in such a being is in aiding and carrying out the dictates of the single propensity. And this is something. There are many of our powers and faculties only in a subordinate degree under the control of the emotions; the intellect itself in many moments requires to be bent to defined attention by compulsion of the will; no mere intensity of desire will thrust it on its tasks. But of what in most men is the characteristic action of the will—namely, self-control—such natures are hardly in want. An ultimate case could be imagined in which they would not need it at all. They have no lower desires to pull down, for they have no higher ones which come into collision with them; the very words "lower"

and "higher," involving the contemporaneous action and collision of two impulses, are inapplicable to them; there is no strife; all their souls impel them in a single line. This may be a quality of the highest character: indeed in the highest character it will certainly be found; no one will question that the whole nature of the holiest being tends to what is holy without let, struggle, or strife—it would be impiety to doubt it. Yet this same quality may certainly be found in a lower—a much lower—mind than the highest. A level may be of any elevation; the absence of intestine commotion may arise from a sluggish dulness to eager aspirations; the one impulse which is felt may be any impulse whatever. If the idea were completely exemplified, one would instinctively say, that a being with so single a mind could hardly belong to human nature. Temptation is the mark of our life; we can hardly divest ourselves of the idea that it is indivisible from our character. As it was said of solitude, so it may be said of the sole dominion of a single impulse: "Whoso is devoted to it would seem to be either a beast or a god".[1]

Completely realised on earth this idea will never be; but approximations may be found, and one of the closest of those approximations is Shelley. We fancy his mind placed in the light of thought, with pure subtle fancies playing to and fro. On a sudden an impulse arises; it is alone, and has nothing to contend with; it cramps the intellect, pushes aside the fancies, constrains the nature; it bolts forward into action. Such a character is an extreme puzzle to external observers. From the occasionality of its impulses it will often seem silly; from their singularity, strange; from their intensity, fanatical. It is absurdest in the more trifling matters. There is a legend of Shelley, during an early visit to London, flying along the street, catching sight of a new

[1] Bacon: "Essay on Friendship".

microscope, buying it in a moment; pawning it the instant afterwards to relieve some one in the same street in distress. The trait may be exaggerated, but it is characteristic. It shows the sudden irruption of his impulses, their abrupt force and curious purity.

The predominant impulse in Shelley from a very early age was "a passion for reforming mankind". Francis Newman has told us in his *Letters from the East* how much he and his half-missionary associates were annoyed at being called "young people trying to convert the world". In a strange land, ignorant of the language, beside a recognised religion, in the midst of an immemorial society, the aim, though in a sense theirs, seemed ridiculous when ascribed to them. Shelley would not have felt this at all. No society, however organised, would have been too strong for him to attack. He would not have paused. The impulse was upon him. He would have been ready to preach that mankind were to be "free, equal, pure, and wise,"[1]—in favour of "justice, and truth, and time, and the world's natural sphere,"[2]—in the Ottoman Empire, or to the Czar, or to George III. Such truths were independent of time and place and circumstance; some time or other, something, or somebody (his faith was a little vague), would most certainly intervene to establish them. It was this placid undoubting confidence which irritated the positive and sceptical mind of Hazlitt. "The author of the 'Prometheus Unbound,'" he tells us, "has a fire in his eye, a fever in his blood, a maggot in his brain, a hectic flutter in his speech, which mark out the philosophic fanatic. He is sanguine-complexioned and shrill-voiced. As is often observable in the case of religious enthusiasts, there is a slenderness of constitutional stamina, which renders the flesh no match for the spirit. His bending, flexible form

[1] "Revolt of Islam," canto vii., stanza xxxiii.

[2] *Ibid.*, stanza xxxi.

appears to take no strong hold of things, does not grapple with the world about him, but slides from it like a river—

> 'And in its liquid texture mortal wound
> Receives no more than can the fluid air'.[1]

The shock of accident, the weight of authority, make no impression on his opinions, which retire like a feather, or rise from the encounter unhurt, through their own buoyancy. He is clogged by no dull system of realities, no earth-bound feelings, no rooted prejudices, by nothing that belongs to the mighty trunk and hard husk of nature and habit; but is drawn up by irresistible levity to the regions of mere speculation and fancy, to the sphere of air and fire, where his delighted spirit floats in 'seas of pearl and clouds of amber'. There is no *caput mortuum* of worn-out threadbare experience to serve as ballast to his mind; it is all volatile, intellectual salt-of-tartar, that refuses to combine its evanescent, inflammable essence with anything solid or anything lasting. Bubbles are to him the only realities:—touch them and they vanish. Curiosity is the only proper category of his mind; and though a man in knowledge, he is a child in feeling."[2] And so on with vituperation. No two characters could, indeed, be found more opposite than the open, eager, buoyant poet, and the dark, threatening, unbelieving critic.

It is difficult to say how far such a tendency under some circumstances might not have carried Shelley into positions most alien to an essential benevolence. It is most dangerous to be possessed with an idea. Dr. Arnold used to say that he had studied the life of Robespierre with the greatest personal benefit. No personal purity is a protection against insatiable zeal; it almost acts in the opposite direction. The less a man is conscious of inferior motives, the more likely

[1] "Paradise Lost," book vi.

[2] Essay "On Paradox and the Commonplace" in the *Table Talk*.

is he to fancy that he is doing God service. There is no difficulty in imagining Shelley cast by the accident of fortune into the Paris of the Revolution; hurried on by its ideas, undoubting in its hopes, wild with its excitement, going forth in the name of freedom conquering and to conquer;—and who can think that he would have been scrupulous how he attained such an end? It was in him to have walked towards it over seas of blood. One could almost identify him with St. Just, "the fair-haired Republican".

On another and a more generally interesting topic, Shelley advanced a theory which amounts to a deification of impulse. "Love," he tells us, "is inevitably consequent upon the perception of loveliness. Love withers under constraint; its very essence is liberty; it is compatible neither with obedience, jealousy, nor fear; it is there most pure, perfect, and unlimited, where its votaries live in confidence, equality, and unreserve. . . . A husband and wife ought to continue united only so long as they love each other. Any law which should bind them to cohabitation for one moment after the decay of their affection would be a most intolerable tyranny, and the most unworthy of toleration. How odious an usurpation of the right of private judgment should that law be considered, which should make the ties of friendship indissoluble, in spite of the caprices, the inconstancy, the fallibility of the human mind! And by so much would the fetters of love be heavier and more unendurable than those of friendship, as love is more vehement and capricious, more dependent on those delicate peculiarities of imagination, and less capable of reduction to the ostensible merits of the object." This passage, no doubt, is from an early and crude essay, one of the notes to "Queen Mab"; and there are many indications, in his latter years, that though he might hold in theory that "constancy has nothing virtuous in itself," yet in practice he shrank from breaking a tie hallowed

by years of fidelity and sympathy. But, though his conduct was doubtless higher than his creed, there is no evidence that his creed was ever changed. The whole tone of his works is on the other side. The "Epipsychidion" could not have been written by a man who attached a moral value to constancy of mind. And the whole doctrine is most expressive of his character. A quivering sensibility endured only the essence of the most refined love. It is intelligible, that one who bowed in a moment to every desire should have attached a kind of consecration to the most pure and eager of human passions.

The evidence of Shelley's poems confirms this impression of him. The characters which he delineates have all this same kind of pure impulse. The reforming impulse is especially felt. In almost every one of his works there is some character, of whom all we know is, that he or she had this passionate disposition to reform mankind. We know nothing else about them, and they are all the same. Laon, in the "Revolt of Islam," does not differ at all from Lionel, in "Rosalind and Helen". Laon differs from Cythna, in the former poem, only as male from female. Lionel is delineated, though not with Shelley's greatest felicity, in a single passage:—

> "Yet through those dungeon-walls there came
> Thy thrilling light, O liberty!
> And as the meteor's midnight flame
> Startles the dreamer, sunlight truth
> Flashed on his visionary youth,
> And filled him, not with love, but faith,
> And hope, and courage, mute in death;
> For love and life in him were twins,
> Born at one birth: in every other
> First life, then love its course begins,
> Though they be children of one mother:
> And so through this dark world they fleet

Divided, till in death they meet.
But he loved all things ever. Then
He passed amid the strife of men,
And stood at the throne of armed power
Pleading for a world of woe:
Secure as one on a rock-built tower
O'er the wrecks which the surge trails to and fro.
'Mid the passions wild of human-kind
He stood, like a spirit calming them;
For, it was said, his words could bind
Like music the lulled crowd, and stem
That torrent of unquiet dream
Which mortals truth and reason deem,
But is revenge, and fear, and pride.
Joyous he was, and hope and peace
On all who heard him did abide,
Raining like dew from his sweet talk,
As, where the evening star may walk
Along the brink of the gloomy seas,
Liquid mists of splendour quiver."

Such is the description of all his reformers in calm. In times of excitement they all burst forth—

"Fear not the tyrants shall rule for ever,
Or the priests of the bloody faith;
They stand on the brink of that mighty river
Whose waves they have tainted with death;
It is fed from the depths of a thousand dells,
Around them it foams, and rages, and swells:
And their swords and their sceptres I floating see,
Like wrecks in the surge of eternity". [1]

In his more didactic poems it is the same. All the world is evil, and will be evil, until some unknown conqueror shall appear—a teacher by rhapsody and a conqueror by words—who shall at once reform all evil. Mathematicians place great reliance on the unknown symbol, great X. Shelley

[1] "Rosalind and Helen."

did more; he expected it would take life and reform our race. Such impersonations are, of course, not real men; they are mere incarnations of a desire. Another passion, which no man has ever felt more strongly than Shelley—the desire to penetrate the mysteries of existence (by Hazlitt profanely called curiosity)—is depicted in "Alastor" as the sole passion of the only person in the poem:—

> "By solemn vision and bright silver dream
> His infancy was nurtured. Every sight
> And sound from the vast earth and ambient air
> Sent to his heart its choicest impulses.
> The fountains of divine philosophy
> Fled not his thirsting lips; and all of great,
> Or good, or lovely, which the sacred past
> In truth or fable consecrates, he felt
> And knew. When early youth had past, he left
> His cold fire-side and alienated home
> To seek strange truths in undiscovered lands.
> Many a wild waste and tangled wilderness
> Has lured his fearless steps; and he has bought
> With his sweet voice and eyes, from savage men,
> His rest and food."

He is cheered on his way by a beautiful dream, and the search to find it again mingles with the shadowy quest. It is remarkable how great is the superiority of the personification in "Alastor," though one of his earliest writings, over the reforming abstractions of his other works. The reason is, its far greater closeness to reality. The one is a description of what he was; the other of what he desired to be. Shelley had nothing of the magic influence, the large insight, the bold strength, the permeating eloquence, which fit a man for a practical reformer: but he had, in perhaps an unequalled and unfortunate measure, the famine of the intellect—the daily insatiable craving after the highest truth which is the passion of "Alastor". So completely did he feel it, that the introductory lines of the poem almost seem

to identify him with the hero; at least they express sentiments which would have been exactly dramatic in his mouth:—

> "Mother of this unfathomable world!
> Favour my solemn song; for I have loved
> Thee ever, and thee only; I have watched
> Thy shadow, and the darkness of thy steps,
> And my heart ever gazes on the depth
> Of thy deep mysteries. I have made my bed
> In charnels and on coffins, where black Death
> Keeps records of the trophies won from thee,
> Hoping to still these obstinate questionings
> Of thee and thine, by forcing some lone ghost,
> Thy messenger, to render up the tale
> Of what we are. In lone and silent hours,
> When night makes a weird sound of its own stillness;
> Like an inspired and desperate alchymist,
> Staking his very life on some dark hope,
> Have I mixed awful talk and asking looks
> With my most innocent love; until strange tears,
> Uniting with those breathless kisses, made
> Such magic as compels the charmed night
> To render up thy charge . . . and though ne'er yet
> Thou hast unveiled thy inmost sanctuary,
> Enough from incommunicable dream,
> And twilight phantasms and deep noonday thought,
> Has shone within me, that serenely now,
> And moveless (as a long-forgotten lyre,
> Suspended in the solitary dome
> Of some mysterious and deserted fane),
> I wait thy breath, Great Parent, that my strain
> May modulate with murmurs of the air,
> And motions of the forests and the sea,
> And voice of living beings, and woven hymns
> Of night and day, and the deep heart of man."

The accompaniments are fanciful; but the essential passion was his own.

These two forms of abstract personification exhaust all which can be considered characters among Shelley's poems

—one poem excepted. Of course, all his works contain "Spirits," "Phantasms," "Dream No. 1," and "Fairy No. 3"; but these do not belong to this world. The higher air seems never to have been favourable to the production of marked character; with almost all poets the inhabitants of it are prone to a shadowy thinness: in Shelley, the habit of frequenting mountain-tops has reduced them to evanescent mists of lyrical energy. One poem of Shelley's, however, has two beings of another order; creations which, if not absolutely dramatic characters of the first class—not beings whom we know better than we know ourselves—are nevertheless very high specimens of the second; persons who seem like vivid recollections from our intimate experience. In this case the dramatic execution is so good, that it is difficult to say why the results are not quite of the first rank. One reason of this is, perhaps, their extreme simplicity. Our imaginations, warned by consciousness and outward experience of the wonderful complexity of human nature, refuse to credit the existence of beings, all whose actions are unmodified consequences of a single principle. These two characters are Beatrice Cenci and her father Count Cenci. In most of Shelley's poems—he died under thirty—there is an extreme suspicion of aged persons. In actual life he had plainly encountered many old gentlemen who had no belief in the complete and philosophical reformation of mankind. There is, indeed, an old hermit in the "Revolt of Islam" who is praised (Captain Medwin identifies him with a Dr. Someone who was kind to Shelley at Eton); but in general the old persons in his poems are persons whose authority it is desirable to disprove:—

> "Old age, with its grey hair
> And wrinkled legends of unworthy things
> And icy sneers, is naught".[1]

[1] "Revolt of Islam," canto ii., stanza xxxiii.

The less its influence, he evidently believes, the better. Not unnaturally, therefore, he selected for a tragedy a horrible subject from Italian story, in which an old man, accomplished in this world's learning, renowned for the "cynic sneer of o'er experienced sin," is the principal evil agent. The character of Count Cenci is that of a man who of set principle does evil for evil's sake. He loves "the sight of agony":

> "All men delight in sensual luxury;
> All men enjoy revenge; and most exult
> Over the tortures they can never feel,
> Flattering their secret peace with others' pain:
> But I delight in nothing else".

If he regrets his age, it is from the failing ability to do evil:—

> "True, I was happier than I am while yet
> Manhood remained to act the thing I thought;
> While lust was sweeter than revenge: and now
> Invention palls".

It is this that makes him contemplate the violation of his daughter:—

> "There yet remains a deed to act,
> Whose horror might make sharp an appetite
> More dull than mine".

Shelley, though an habitual student of Plato—the greatest modern writer who has taken great pleasure in his writings—never seems to have read any treatise of Aristotle; otherwise he would certainly seem to have derived from that great writer the idea of the ἀκόλαστος; yet in reality the idea is as natural to Shelley as any man—more likely to occur to him than to most. Children think that everybody who is bad is very bad. Their simple eager disposition only understands the doing what they wish to do; they do not refine: if they hear of a man doing evil, they think he wishes to do

it,—that he has a special impulse to do evil, as they have to do what they do. Something like this was the case with Shelley. His mind, impulsive and childlike, could not imagine the struggling kind of character—either those which struggle with their lower nature and conquer, or those which struggle and are vanquished—either the ἐγκρατής or the ἀκρατής of the old thinker; but he could comprehend that which is in reality far worse than either, the being who wishes to commit sin because it is sin, who is as it were possessed with a demon hurrying him out, hot and passionate, to vice and crime. The innocent child is whirled away by one impulse; the passionate reformer by another; the essential criminal, if such a being be possible, by a third. They are all beings, according to one division, of the same class. An imaginative mind like Shelley's, belonging to the second of these types, naturally is prone in some moods to embody itself under the forms of the third. It is, as it were, the antithesis to itself.—Equally simple is the other character—that of Beatrice. Even before her violation, by a graphic touch of art, she is described as absorbed, or beginning to be absorbed, in the consciousness of her wrongs.

> "*Beatrice.* As I have said, speak to me not of love.
> Had you a dispensation, I have not;
> Nor will I leave this home of misery
> Whilst my poor Bernard, and that gentle lady
> To whom I owe life and these virtuous thoughts,
> Must suffer what I still have strength to share.
> Alas, Orsino! all the love that once
> I felt for you is turned to bitter pain.
> Ours was a youthful contract, which you first
> Broke by assuming vows no Pope will loose:
> And yet I love you still, but holily,
> Even as a sister or a spirit might;
> And so I swear a cold fidelity."

After her violation, her whole being is absorbed by one thought,—how and by what subtle vengeance she can expiate the memory of her shame. These are all the characters in Shelley; an impulsive unity is of the essence of them all.

The same characteristic of Shelley's temperament produced also most marked effects on his speculative opinions. The peculiarity of his creed early brought him into opposition to the world. His education seems to have been principally directed by his father, of whom the only description which has reached us is not favourable. Sir Timothy Shelley, according to Captain Medwin, was an illiterate country gentleman of an extinct race; he had been at Oxford, where he learned nothing, had made the grand tour, from which he brought back "a smattering of bad French and a bad picture of an eruption at Vesuvius". He had the air of the old school, and the habit of throwing it off which distinguished that school. Lord Chesterfield himself was not easier on matters of morality. He used to tell his son that he would provide for natural children *ad infinitum*, but would never forgive his making a *mésalliance*. On religion his opinions were very lax. He, indeed, "required his servants," we are told, "to attend church," and even on rare occasions, with superhuman virtue, attended himself; but there, as with others of that generation, his religion ended. He doubtless did not feel that any more could be required of him. He was not consciously insincere; but he did not in the least realise the opposition between the religion which he professed and the conduct which he pursued. Such a person was not likely to influence a morbidly sincere imaginative nature in favour of the doctrines of the Church of England. Shelley went from Eton, where he had been singular, to Oxford, where he was more so. He was a fair classical scholar. But his real mind was given to out-of-school knowledge. He had written a novel; he had studied

chemistry; when pressed in argument, he used to ask: "What, then, does Condorcet say upon the subject?" This was not exactly the youth for the University of Oxford in the year 1810. A distinguished pupil of that University once observed to us: "The use of the University of Oxford is, that no one can over-read himself there. The appetite for knowledge is repressed. A blight is thrown over the ingenuous mind," etc. And possibly it may be so; considering how small a space literary knowledge fills in the busy English world, it may not be without its advantages that any mind prone to bookish enthusiasm should be taught by the dryness of its appointed studies, the want of sympathy of its teachers, and a rough contact with average English youth, that studious enthusiasm must be its own reward; that in this country it will meet with little other; that it will not be encouraged in high places. Such discipline may, however, be carried too far. A very enthusiastic mind may possibly by it be turned in upon itself. This was the case with Shelley. When he first came up to Oxford, physics were his favourite pursuit. On chemistry, especially, he used to be eloquent. "The galvanic battery," said he, "is a new engine. It has been used hitherto to an insignificant extent: yet it has worked wonders already. What will not an extraordinary combination of troughs of colossal magnitude, a well-arranged system of hundreds of metallic plates, effect?" Nature, however, like the world, discourages a wild enthusiasm. "His chemical operations seemed to an unskilful observer to promise nothing but disasters. He had blown himself up at Eton. He had inadvertently swallowed some mineral poison, which he declared had seriously injured his health, and from the effects of which he should never recover. His hands, his clothes, his books, and his furniture, were stained and covered by medical acids," and so on. Disgusted with these and other failures, he

abandoned physics for metaphysics. He rushed headlong into the form of philosophy then popular. It is not likely that he ever read Locke; and it is easy to imagine the dismay with which the philosopher would have regarded so "heady and skittish" a disciple: but he continually invoked Locke as an authority, and was really guided by the French expositions of him then popular. Hume, of course, was not without his influence. With such teachers only to control him, an excitable poet rushed in a moment to materialism, and thence to atheism. Deriving any instruction from the University, was, according to him, absurd; he wished to convert the University. He issued a kind of thesis, stating by way of interrogatory all the difficulties of the subject; called it the "necessity of atheism," and sent it to the professors, heads of houses, and several bishops. The theistic belief of his college was equal to the occasion. "It was a fine spring morning on Lady Day in the year 1811, when," says a fellow-student, "I went to Shelley's rooms. He was absent; but before I had collected our books, he rushed in. He was terribly agitated. I anxiously inquired what had happened. 'I am expelled.' He then explained that he had been summoned before the Master and some of the Fellows; that as he was unable to deny the authorship of the essay, he had been expelled and ordered to quit the college the next morning at latest." He had wished to be put on his trial more regularly, and stated to the Master that England was a "free country"; but without effect. He was obliged to leave Oxford: his father was very angry; "if he had broken the Master's windows, one could have understood it": but to be expelled for publishing a *book* seemed an error incorrigible, because incomprehensible.

These details at once illustrate Shelley's temperament, and enable us to show that the peculiarity of his opinions arose out of that temperament. He was placed in circum-

stances which left his eager mind quite free. Of his father we have already spoken: there was no one else to exercise a subduing or guiding influence over him; nor would his mind have naturally been one extremely easy to influence. Through life he followed very much his own bent and his own thoughts. His most intimate associates exercised very little control over his belief. He followed his nature; and that nature was in a singular degree destitute of certain elements which most materially guide ordinary men. It seems most likely that a person prone to isolated impulse will be defective in the sensation of conscience. There is scarcely room for it. When, as in common conflicting characters, the whole nature is daily and hourly in a perpetual struggle, the faculty which decides what elements in that nature are to have the supremacy is daily and hourly appealed to. Passions are contending; life is a discipline; there is a reference every moment to the directory of the discipline—the order-book of the passions. In temperaments not exposed to the ordinary struggle there is no such necessity. Their impulse guides them; they have little temptation; are scarcely under the law; have hardly occasion to consult the statute-book. In consequence, simple and beautiful as such minds often are, they are deficient in the sensation of duty; have no haunting idea of right or wrong; show an easy *abandon* in place of a severe self-scrutiny. At first it might seem that such minds lose little; they are exempted from the consciousness of a code to whose provisions they need little access. But such would be the conclusion only from a superficial view of human nature. The whole of our inmost faith is a series of intuitions; and experience seems to show that the intuitions of conscience are the beginning of that series. Childhood has little which can be called a religion; the shows of this world, the play of its lights and shadows, suffice. It is in the collision of our nature, which occurs in

youth, that the first real sensation of faith is felt. Conscience is often then morbidly acute; a flush passes over the youthful mind; the guiding instinct is keen and strong, like the passions with which it contends. At the first struggle of our nature commences our religion. Childhood will utter the words; in early manhood, when we become half-unwilling to utter them, they begin to have a meaning. The result of history is similar. The whole of religion rests on a faith that the universe is solely ruled by an almighty and all-perfect Being. This strengthens with the moral cultivation, and grows with the improvement of mankind. It is the assumed axiom of the creed of Christendom; and all that is really highest in our race may have the degree of its excellence tested by the degree of the belief in it. But experience shows that the belief only grows very gradually. We see at various times, and now, vast outlying nations in whom the conviction of morality—the consciousness of a law—is but weak; and there the belief in an all-perfect God is half-forgotten, faint, and meagre. It exists as something between a tradition and a speculation; but it does not come forth on the solid earth; it has no place in the "business and bosoms" [1] of men; it is thrust out of view even when we look upwards by fancied idols and dreams of the stars in their courses. Consider the state of the Jewish, as compared with the better part of the pagan world of old. On the one side we see civilisation, commerce, the arts, a great excellence in all the exterior of man's life; a sort of morality sound and sensible, placing the good of man in a balanced moderation within and good looks without;—in a combination of considerate good sense, with the *air* of aristocratic, or, as it was said, "godlike" refinement. We see, in a word, civilisation, and the ethics of civilisation; the first

[1] Bacon: Dedication to *Essays*.

polished, the other elaborated and perfected. But this is all; we do not see faith. We see in some quarters rather a horror of the *curiosus deus* interfering, controlling, watching—never letting things alone—disturbing the quiet of the world with punishment and the fear of punishment. The Jewish side of the picture is different. We see a people who have perhaps an inaptitude for independent civilisation, who in secular pursuits have only been assistants and attendants on other nations during the whole history of mankind. These have no equable, beautiful morality like the others; but instead a gnawing, abiding, depressing—one might say, a slavish—ceremonial, excessive sense of law and duty. This nation has faith. By a link not logical, but ethical, this intense, eating, abiding, supremacy of conscience is connected with a deep daily sense of a watchful, governing, and jealous God. And from the people of the law arises the gospel. The sense of duty, when awakened, awakens not only the religion of the law, but in the end the other religious intuitions which lie round about it. The faith of Christendom has arisen not from a great people, but from "the least of all people,"—from the people whose anxious legalism was a noted contrast to the easy, impulsive life of pagan nations. In modern language, conscience is the *converting* intuition,—that which turns men from the world without to that within,—from the things which are seen to the realities which are not seen. In a character like Shelley's, where this haunting, abiding, oppressive moral feeling is wanting or defective, the religious belief in an Almighty God which springs out of it is likely to be defective likewise.

In Shelley's case this deficiency was aggravated by what may be called the abstract character of his intellect. We have shown that no character except his own, and characters most strictly allied to his own, are delineated in his works. The tendency of his mind was rather to personify isolated

qualities or impulses—equality, liberty, revenge, and so on —than to create out of separate parts or passions the single conception of an entire character. This is, properly speaking, the mythological tendency. All early nations show this marked disposition to conceive of separate forces and qualities as a kind of semi-persons; that is, not true actual persons with distinct characters, but beings who guide certain influences, and of whom all we know is that they guide those influences. Shelley evinces a remarkable tendency to deal with mythology in this simple and elementary form. Other poets have breathed into mythology a modern life; have been attracted by those parts which seem to have a religious meaning, and have enlarged that meaning while studying to embody it. With Shelley it is otherwise; the parts of mythology by which he is attracted are the bare parts—the simple stories which Dr. Johnson found so tedious:—

"Arethusa arose
From her couch of snows
In the Acroceraunian mountains.
From cloud and from crag,
With many a jag,
Shepherding her bright fountains,
She leapt down the rocks
With her rainbow locks
Streaming among the streams;
Her steps paved with green
The downward ravine,
Which slopes to the western gleams
And gliding and springing,
She went ever singing,
In murmurs as soft as sleep;
The earth seemed to love her,
And heaven smiled above her,
As she lingered towards the deep.

Then Alpheus bold,
On his glacier cold,
With his trident the mountains strook,"
Etc., etc. [1]

Arethusa and Alpheus are not characters: they are only the spirits of the fountain and the stream. When not writing on topics connected with ancient mythology, Shelley shows the same bent. "The Cloud" and "The Skylark" are more like mythology—have more of the impulse by which the populace, if we may so say, of the external world was first fancied into existence—than any other modern poems. There is, indeed, no habit of mind more remote from our solid and matter-of-fact existence; none which was once powerful, of which the present traces are so rare. In truth, Shelley's imagination achieved all it could with the materials before it. The materials for the creative faculty must be provided by the receptive faculty. Before a man can imagine what will seem to be realities, he must be familiar with what are realities. The memory of Shelley had no heaped-up "store of life," no vast accumulation of familiar characters. His intellect did not tend to the strong grasp of realities; its taste was rather for the subtle refining of theories, the distilling of exquisite abstractions. His imagination personified what his understanding presented to it. It had nothing else to do. He displayed the same tendency of mind—sometimes negatively and sometimes positively—in his professedly religious inquiries. His belief went through three stages—first, materialism, then a sort of Nihilism, then a sort of Platonism. In neither of them is the rule of the universe ascribed to a character: in the first and last it is ascribed to animated abstractions; in the second there is no universe at all. In neither of them is there any strong grasp of fact. The writings of the first

[1] "Arethusa."

period are clearly influenced by, and modelled on, Lucretius. He held the same abstract theory of nature—sometimes of half-personified atoms, moving hither and thither of themselves—at other times of a general pervading spirit of nature, holding the same relation to nature, as a visible object, that Arethusa the goddess bears to Arethusa the stream :—

" The magic car moved on.
As they approached their goal
The coursers seemed to gather speed :
The sea no longer was distinguished ; earth
Appeared a vast and shadowy sphere :
The sun's unclouded orb
Rolled through the black concave ;
Its rays of rapid light
Parted around the chariot's swifter course,
And fell like ocean's feathery spray
Dashed from the boiling surge
Before a vessel's prow.

" The magic car moved on.
Earth's distant orb appeared
The smallest light that twinkles in the heavens :
Whilst round the chariot's way
Innumerable systems rolled,
And countless spheres diffused
An ever-varying glory.
It was a sight of wonder : some
Were horned like the crescent moon ;
Some shed a mild and silver beam
Like Hesperus o'er the western sea ;
Some dash'd athwart with trains of flame,
Like worlds to death and ruin driven ;
Some shone like stars, and, as the chariot passed,
Bedimmed all other light.

" Spirit of Nature ! here,
In this interminable wilderness
Of worlds, at whose immensity
Even soaring fancy staggers,—

Here is thy fitting temple.
Yet not the slightest leaf
That quivers to the passing breeze
Is less instinct with thee;
Yet not the meanest worm
That lurks in graves and fattens on the dead
Less shares thy eternal breath.
Spirit of Nature! thou,
Imperishable as this glorious scene,—
Here is thy fitting temple." [1]

And he copied not only the opinions of Lucretius, but also his tone. Nothing is more remarkable than that two poets of the first rank should have felt a bounding joy in the possession of opinions which, if true, ought, one would think, to move an excitable nature to the keenest and deepest melancholy. That this life is all, that there is no God, but only atoms and a moulding breath, are singular doctrines to be accepted with joy: they only could have been so accepted by wild minds bursting with imperious energy, knowing of no law, "wreaking thoughts upon expression" of which they knew neither the meaning nor the result. From this stage Shelley's mind passed to another; but not immediately to one of greater belief. On the contrary, it was the doctrine of Hume which was called in to expel the doctrine of Epicurus. His previous teachers had taught him that there was nothing except matter: the Scotch sceptic met him at that point with the question—Is matter certain? Hume, as is well known, adopted the negative part from the theory of materialism and the theory of immaterialism, but rejected the positive side of both. He held, or professed to hold, that there was no substantial thing, either matter or mind; but only "sensations and impressions" flying about the universe, inhering in nothing and going nowhere. These,

[1] "Queen Mab."

he said, were the only subjects of consciousness; all you felt was your feeling, and all your thought was your thought; the rest was only hypothesis. The notion that there was any "*you*" at all was a theory generally current among mankind, but not, unless proved, to be accepted by the philosopher. This doctrine, though little agreeable to the world in general, has an excellence in the eyes of youthful disputants; it is a doctrine which no one will admit, and which no one can disprove. Shelley accordingly accepted it; indeed it was a better description of his universe than of most people's; his mind was filled with a swarm of ideas, fancies, thoughts, streaming on without his volition, without plan or order. He might be pardoned for fancying that they were all; he could not see the outward world for them; their giddy passage occupied him till he forgot himself. He has put down the theory in its barest form: "The most refined abstractions of logic conduct to a view of life which, though startling to the apprehension, is, in fact, that which the habitual sense of its repeated combinations has extinguished in us. It strips, as it were, the painted curtain from this scene of things. I confess that I am one of those who am unable to refuse my assent to the conclusions of those philosophers who assert that nothing exists but as it is perceived."[1] And again: "The view of life presented by the most refined deductions of the intellectual philosophy is that of unity. Nothing exists but as it is perceived. The difference is merely nominal between those two classes of thought which are vulgarly distinguished by the names of ideas and of external objects. Pursuing the same thread of reasoning, the existence of distinct individual minds, similar to that which is employed in now questioning its own nature, is likewise found to be a delusion. The words, *I*, *you*, *they*, are not signs of any actual difference subsisting between the

[1] "On Life," in *Essays*.

assemblage of thoughts thus indicated, but are merely marks employed to denote the different modifications of the one mind. Let it not be supposed that this doctrine conducts to the monstrous presumption that I, the person who now write and think, am that one mind. I am but a portion of it. The words, *I*, and *you*, and *they*, are grammatical devices invented simply for arrangement, and totally devoid of the intense and exclusive sense usually attached to them. It is difficult to find terms adequate to express so subtle a conception as that to which the intellectual philosophy has conducted us. We are on that verge where words abandon us; and what wonder if we grow dizzy to look down the dark abyss of how little we know!"[1] On his wild nerves these speculations produced a great effect. Their thin acuteness excited his intellect; their blank result appalled his imagination. He was obliged to pause in the last fragment of one of his metaphysical papers, "dizzy from thrilling horror". In this state of mind he began to study Plato; and it is probable that in the whole library of philosophy there is no writer so suitable to such a reader. A common modern author, believing in mind and matter, he would have put aside at once as loose and popular. He was attracted by a writer who, like himself, in some sense did not believe in either—who supplied him with subtle realities different from either, at once to be extracted by his intellect and to be glorified by his imagination. The theory of Plato, that the all-apparent phenomena were unreal, he believed already; he had a craving to believe in something noble, beautiful, and difficult to understand; he was ready, therefore, to accept the rest of that theory, and to believe that these passing phenomena were imperfect types and resemblances—imperfect incarnations, so to speak—of certain immovable, eternal, archetypal realities. All his later writings are coloured by that theory,

[1] "On Life," in *Essays*.

though in some passages the remains of the philosophy of the senses with which he commenced appear in odd proximity to the philosophy of abstractions with which he concluded. There is, perhaps, no allusion in Shelley to the *Phædrus;* but no one can doubt which of Plato's ideas would be most attractive to the nature we have described. The most valuable part of Plato he did not comprehend. There is in Shelley none of that unceasing reference to ethical consciousness and ethical religion which has for centuries placed Plato first among the preparatory preceptors of Christianity. The general doctrine is that—

> "The one remains, the many change and pass;
> Heaven's light for ever shines, earth's shadows fly;
> Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
> Stains the white radiance of eternity,
> Until death tramples it to fragments".[1]

The particular worship of the poet is paid to that one spirit whose—

> "Plastic stress
> Sweeps through the dull dense world, compelling there
> All new successions to the forms they wear;
> Torturing th' unwilling dross that checks its flight
> To its own likeness, as each mass may bear;
> And bursting in its beauty and its might
> From trees, and beasts, and men, into the heaven's light".[2]

It is evident that not even in this, the highest form of creed to which he ever clearly attained, is there any such distinct conception of a character as is essential to a real religion. The conception of God is not to be framed out of a single attribute. Shelley has changed the "idea" of beauty into a spirit, and this probably for the purposes of poetry; he has given it life and animal motion; but he has done no more; the "spirit" has no will, and no virtue: it is

[1] "Adonais," stanza lii. [2] *Ibid.*, stanza xliii.

animated, but unholy; alive, but unmoral: it is an object of intense admiration; it is not an object of worship.

We have ascribed this quality of Shelley's writings to an abstract intellect; and in part, no doubt, correctly. Shelley had, probably by nature, such an intellect; it was self-enclosed, self-absorbed, teeming with singular ideas, remote from character and life; but so involved is human nature, that this tendency to abstraction, which we have spoken of as aggravating the consequences of his simple impulsive temperament, was itself aggravated by that temperament. It is a received opinion in metaphysics, that the idea of personality is identical with the idea of will. A distinguished French writer has accurately expressed this: "Le pouvoir," says M. Jouffroy, "que l'homme a de s'emparer de ses capacités naturelles et de les diriger fait de lui une *personne;* et c'est parce que les *choses* n'exercent pas ce pouvoir en elles-mêmes, qu'elles ne sont que des choses. Telle est la véritable différence qui distingue les choses des personnes. Toutes les natures possibles sont douées de certaines capacités; mais les unes ont reçu par-dessus les autres le privilége de se saisir d'elles-mêmes et de se gouverner: celles-là sont les personnes. Les autres en ont été privées, en sorte qu'elles n'ont point de part à ce qui se fait en elles: celles-là sont les choses. Leurs capacités ne s'en développent pas moins, mais c'est exclusivement selon les lois auxquelles Dieu les a soumises. C'est Dieu qui gouverne en elles; il est la personne des choses, comme l'ouvrier est la personne de la montre. Ici la personne est hors de l'être; dans le sein même des choses, comme dans le sein de la montre, la personne ne se rencontre pas; on ne trouve qu'une série de capacités qui se meuvent aveuglément, sans que le nature qui en est douée sache même ce qu'elles font. Aussi ne peut-on demander compte aux choses de ce qui se fait en elles; il faut s'adresser à Dieu: comme on s'adresse à l'ouvrier et non

à la montre, quand la montre va mal." And if this theory be true—and doubtless it is an approximation to the truth—it is evident that a mind ordinarily moved by simple impulse will have little distinct consciousness of personality. While thrust forward by such impulse, it is a mere instrument. Outward things set it in motion. It goes where they bid; it exerts no will upon them; it is, to speak expressively, a mere conducting thing. When such a mind is free from such impulse, there is even less will; thoughts, feelings, ideas, emotions, pass before it in a sort of dream. For the time it is a mere perceiving thing. In neither case is there a trace of voluntary character. If we want a reason for anything, "il faut s'adresser à Dieu".

Shelley's political opinions were likewise the effervescence of his peculiar nature. The love of liberty is peculiarly natural to the simple impulsive mind. It feels irritated at the idea of a law; it fancies it does not need it: it really needs it less than other minds. Government seems absurd —society an incubus. It has hardly patience to estimate particular institutions; it wants to begin again—to make a *tabula rasa* of all which men have created or devised; for they seem to have been constructed on a false system, for an object it does not understand. On this *tabula rasa* Shelley's abstract imagination proceeded to set up arbitrary monstrosities of "equality" and "love," which never will be realised among the children of men.

Such a mind is clearly driven to self-delineation. Nature, no doubt, in some sense remains to it. A dreamy mind—a mind occupied intensely with its own thoughts—will often have a peculiarly intense apprehension of anything which by the hard collision of the world it has been forced to observe. The scene stands out alone in the memory; is a refreshment from hot thoughts; grows with the distance of years. A mind like Shelley's, deeply susceptible to all things beautiful,

has many pictures and images shining in its recollection which it recurs to, and which it is ever striving to delineate. Indeed, in such minds it is rather the picture in their mind which they describe than the original object; the "ideation," as some harsh metaphysicians call it, rather than the reality. A certain dream-light is diffused over it; a wavering touch, as of interfering fancy or fading recollection. The landscape has not the hues of the real world; it is modified in the *camera obscura* of the self-enclosed intelligence. Nor can such a mind long endure the cold process of external delineation. Its own hot thoughts rush in; its favourite topic is itself and them. Shelley, indeed, as we observed before, carries this to an extent which no poet probably ever equalled. He described not only his character but his circumstances. We know that this is so in a large number of passages; if his poems were commented on by some one thoroughly familiar with the events of his life, we should doubtless find that it was so in many more. On one strange and painful scene his fancy was continually dwelling. In a gentle moment we have a dirge:—

"The warm sun is failing, the bleak wind is wailing,
The bare boughs are sighing, the pale flowers are dying,
And the year
On the earth her deathbed, in a shroud of leaves, dead
Is lying.
Come months, come away,
From November to May,
In your saddest array;
Follow the bier
Of the dead cold year,
And like dim shadows watch by her sepulchre.

The chill rain is falling, the nipt worm is crawling,
The rivers are swelling, the thunder is knelling;
For the year;
The blithe swallows are flown, and the lizards each gone
To his dwelling.

Come months, come away;
Put on white, black, and grey;
Let your light sisters play—
Ye, follow the bier
Of the dead cold year,
And make her grave green with tear on tear." [1]

In a frenzied mood he breaks forth into wildness:—

"She is still, she is cold
On the bridal couch;
One step to the white deathbed,
And one to the bier,
And one to the charnel—and one, O, where?
The dark arrow fled
In the noon.

"Ere the sun through heaven once more has roll'd,
The rats in her heart
Will have made their nest,
And the worms be alive in her golden hair;
While the spirit that guides the sun
Sits throned in his flaming chair,
She shall sleep." [2]

There is no doubt that these and a hundred other similar passages allude to the death of his first wife; as melancholy a story as ever shivered the nerves of an excitable being. The facts are hardly known to us, but they are something like these: In very early youth Shelley had formed a half-fanciful attachment to a cousin, a Miss Harriet Grove, who is said to have been attractive, and to whom, certainly, his fancy often went back in later and distant years. How deep the feeling was on either side we do not know; she seems to have taken an interest in the hot singular dreams which occupied his mind—except only where her image might intrude—from which one might conjecture that she took unusual interest in him; she even wrote some chapters, or parts of

[1] Autumn. [2] Dirge at the close of "Ginevra".

some, in one of his boyish novels, and her parents doubtless thought the "Rosicrucian" could be endured, as Shelley was the heir to land and a baronetcy. His expulsion from Oxford altered all this. Probably he had always among his friends been thought "a singular young man," and they had waited in perplexity to see if the oddness would turn to unusual good or unusual evil. His atheistic treatise and its results seemed to show clearly the latter, and all communication with Miss Grove was instantly forbidden him. What she felt on the subject is not told us; probably some theistic and undreaming lover intervened, for she married in a short time. The despair of an excitable poet at being deprived of his mistress at the same moment that he was abandoned by his family, and in a measure by society, may be fancied, though it cannot be known. Captain Medwin observes: "Shelley, on this trying occasion, had the courage to live, in order that he might labour for one great object—the advancement of the human race, and the amelioration of society; and strengthened himself in a resolution to devote his energies to his ultimate end, being prepared to endure every obloquy, to make every sacrifice for its accomplishment: and would," such is the Captain's English, "if necessary, have died in the cause". It does not appear, however, that disappointed love took solely the very unusual form of philanthropy. By chance, whether with or without leave does not appear, he went to see his second sister, who was at school at a place called Balham Hill, near London; and, while walking in the garden with her, "a Miss Westbrook passed them". She was a "handsome blonde young lady, nearly sixteen"; and Shelley was much struck. He found out that her name was "Harriett,"—as he, after his marriage, anxiously expresses it, with two t's, "Harriett";—and he fell in love at once. She had the name of his first love: "fairer, though yet the same". After his manner, he wrote to her immediately. He

was in the habit of doing this to people who interested him, either in his own or under an assumed name: and once, Captain Medwin says, carried on a long correspondence with Mrs. Hemans, then Miss Brown, under his (the captain's) name; but which he, the deponent, was not permitted to peruse. In Miss Westbrook's case the correspondence had a more serious consequence. Of her character we can only guess a little. She was, we think, an ordinary blooming young lady of sixteen. Shelley was an extraordinary young man of nineteen, rather handsome, very animated, and expressing his admiration a little intensely. He was doubtless much the most aristocratic person she had ever spoken to; for her father was a retired innkeeper, and Shelley had always the air of a man of birth. There is a vision, too, of an elder sister, who made "Harriett dear" very uncomfortable. On the whole, the result may be guessed. At the end of August, 1811, we do not know the precise day, they were married at Gretna Green. Jests may be made on it; but it was no laughing matter in the life of the wife or the husband. Of the lady's disposition and mind we know nothing, except from Shelley; a medium which must, under the circumstances, be thought a distorting one. We should conclude that she was capable of making many people happy, though not of making Shelley happy. There is an ordinance of nature at which men of genius are perpetually fretting, but which does more good than many laws of the universe which they praise: it is, that ordinary women ordinarily prefer ordinary men. "Genius," as Hazlitt would have said, "puts them out." It is so strange; it does not come into the room as usual; it says "such things": once it forgot to brush its hair. The common female mind prefers usual tastes, settled manners, customary conversation, defined and practical pursuits. And it is a great good that it should be so. Nature has no wiser instinct. The average woman suits the average

man; good health, easy cheerfulness, common charms, suffice. If Miss Westbrook had married an everyday person—a gentleman, suppose, in the tallow line—she would have been happy, and have made him happy. Her mind could have understood his life; her society would have been a gentle relief from unodoriferous pursuits. She had nothing in common with Shelley. His mind was full of eager thoughts, wild dreams, singular aspirations. The most delicate tact would probably have often failed, the nicest sensibility would have been jarred, affection would have erred, in dealing with such a being. A very peculiar character was required, to enter into such a rare union of curious qualities. Some eccentric men of genius have, indeed, felt in the habitual tact and serene nothingness of ordinary women, a kind of trust and calm. They have admired an instinct of the world which they had not—a repose of mind they could not share. But this is commonly in later years. A boy of twenty thinks he knows the world; he is too proud and happy in his own eager and shifting thoughts, to wish to contrast them with repose. The commonplaceness of life goads him: placid society irritates him. Bread is an incumbrance; upholstery tedious; he craves excitement; he wishes to reform mankind. You cannot convince him it is right to sow, in a world so full of sorrow and evil. Shelley was in this state; he hurried to and fro over England, pursuing theories, and absorbed in plans. He was deep in metaphysics; had subtle disproofs of all religion; wrote several poems, which would have been a puzzle to a very clever young lady. There were pecuniary difficulties besides: neither of the families had approved of the match, and neither were inclined to support the household. Altogether, no one can be surprised that in less than three years the hasty union ended in a "separation by mutual consent". The wonder is that it lasted so long. What her conduct was after the separation, is not very clear:

there were "reports" about her at Bath—perhaps a loquacious place. She was not twenty, probably handsome, and not improbably giddy: being quite without evidence, we cannot judge what was rumour and what was truth. Shelley has not left us in similar doubt. After a year or two he travelled abroad with Mary, afterwards the second Mrs. Shelley, the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin—names most celebrated in those times, and even now known for their anti-matrimonial speculations. Of their "six weeks'" tour abroad, in the year 1816, a record remains, and should be read by any persons who wish to learn what travelling was in its infancy. It was the year when the Continent was first thrown open to English travellers; and few probably adopted such singular means of locomotion as Shelley and his companions. First they tried walking, and had a very small ass to carry their portmanteau; then they tried a mule; then a *fiacre*, which drove away from them; afterwards they came to a raft. It was not, however, an unamusing journey. At an ugly and out-of-the-way château, near Brunen, Shelley began a novel, to be called "The Assassins," which he never finished—probably never continued—after his return; but which still remains, and is one of the most curious and characteristic specimens of his prose style. It was a refreshing intellectual tour; one of the most pleasant rambles of his life. On his return he was met by painful intelligence. His wife had destroyed herself. Of her state of mind we have again no evidence. She is said to have been deeply affected by the "reports" to which we have alluded; but whatever it was, Shelley felt himself greatly to blame. He had been instrumental in first dividing her from her family; had connected himself with her in a wild contract, from which neither could ever be set free; if he had not crossed her path, she might have been happy in her own way and in her own sphere.

All this preyed upon his mind, and it is said he became mad; and whether or not his horror and pain went the length of actual frenzy, they doubtless approached that border-line of suffering excitement which divides the most melancholy form of sanity from the most melancholy form of insanity. In several poems he seems to delineate himself in the guise of a maniac:—

" 'Of his sad history
I know but this,' said Maddalo; 'he came
To Venice a dejected man, and fame
Said he was wealthy, or he had been so.
Some thought the loss of fortune wrought him woe;
But he was ever talking in such sort
As you do,—but more sadly: he seem'd hurt,
Even as a man with his peculiar wrong,
To hear but of the oppression of the strong,
Or those absurd deceits (I think with you
In some respects, you know) which carry through
The excellent impostors of this earth
When they outface detection. He had worth,
Poor fellow! but a humourist in his way.'—
—'Alas, what drove him mad?'
'I cannot say:
A lady came with him from France; and when
She left him and returned, he wander'd then
About yon lonely isles of desert sand
Till he grew wild. He had no cash nor land
Remaining:—the police had brought him here—
Some fancy took him, and he would not bear
Removal; so I fitted up for him
Those rooms beside the sea, to please his whim;
And sent him busts, and books, and urns for flowers,
Which had adorned his life in happier hours,
And instruments of music. You may guess,
A stranger could do little more or less
For one so gentle and unfortunate—
And those are his sweet strains, which charm the weight
From madmen's chains, and make this hell appear
A heaven of sacred silence, hushed to hear.'

'Nay, this was kind of you,—he had no claim,
As the world says.'

'None but the very same,
Which I on all mankind, were I, as he,
Fall'n to such deep reverse. His melody
Is interrupted; now we hear the din
Of madmen, shriek on shriek, again begin;
Let us now visit him: after this strain
He ever communes with himself again,
And sees and hears not any.'

Having said
These words, we called the keeper: and he led
To an apartment opening on the sea—
There the poor wretch was sitting mournfully
Near a piano, his pale fingers twined
One with the other; and the ooze and wind
Rushed through an open casement, and did sway
His hair, and starred it with the brackish spray:
His head was leaning on a music-book,
And he was muttering; and his lean limbs shook;
His lips were pressed against a folded leaf,
In hue too beautiful for health, and grief
Smiled in their motions as they lay apart,
As one who wrought from his own fervid heart
The eloquence of passion: soon he raised
His sad meek face, and eyes lustrous and glazed,
And spoke,—sometimes as one who wrote and thought
His words might move some heart that heeded not,
If sent to distant lands;—and then as one
Reproaching deeds never to be undone,
With wondering self-compassion; then his speech
Was lost in grief, and then his words came each
Unmodulated and expressionless,—
But that from one jarred accent you might guess
It was despair made them so uniform:
And all the while the loud and gusty storm
Hissed through the window; and we stood behind,
Stealing his accents from the envious wind,
Unseen. I yet remember what he said
Distinctly—such impression his words made!"[1]

[1] "Julian and Maddalo."

And casual illustrations—unconscious metaphors, showing a terrible familiarity—are borrowed from insanity in his subsequent works.

This strange story is in various ways deeply illustrative of his character. It shows how the impulsive temperament, not definitely intending evil, is hurried forward, so to say, *over* actions and crimes which would seem to indicate deep depravity—which would do so in ordinary human nature, but which do not indicate in it anything like the same degree of guilt. Driven by singular passion across a tainted region, it retains no taint; on a sudden it passes through evil, but preserves its purity. So curious is this character, that a record of its actions may read like a libel on its life.

To some the story may also suggest whether Shelley's nature was one of those most adapted for love in its highest form. It is impossible to deny that he loved with a great intensity; yet it was with a certain narrowness, and therefore a certain fitfulness. Possibly a somewhat wider nature, taking hold of other characters at more points,—fascinated as intensely, but more variously,—stirred as deeply, but through more complicated emotions,—is requisite for the highest and most lasting feeling. Passion, to be enduring, must be many-sided. Eager and narrow emotions urge like the gadfly of the poet: but they pass away; they are single; there is nothing to revive them. Various as human nature must be the passion which absorbs that nature into itself. Shelley's mode of delineating women has a corresponding peculiarity. They are well described; but they are described under only one aspect. Every one of his poems almost has a lady whose arms are white, whose mind is sympathising, and whose soul is beautiful. She has many names—Cythna, Asia, Emily;[1] but these are only external disguises; she is indubitably the same person, for her character

[1] "Revolt of Islam"; "Prometheus Unbound"; "Epipsychidion".

never varies. No character can be simpler. She is described as the ideal object of love in its most simple and elemental form; the pure object of the essential passion. She is a being to be loved in a single moment, with eager eyes and gasping breath; but you feel that in that moment you have seen the whole. There is nothing to come to afterwards. The fascination is intense, but uniform. There is not the ever-varying grace, the ever-changing expression of the unchanging charm, that alone can attract for all time the shifting moods of a various and mutable nature.

The works of Shelley lie in a confused state, like the *disjecta membra* of the poet of our boyhood. They are in the strictest sense "remains". It is absurd to expect from a man who died at thirty a long work of perfected excellence. All which at so early an age can be expected are fine fragments, casual expressions of single inspirations. Of these Shelley has written some that are nearly, and one or two perhaps that are quite, perfect. But he has not done more. It would have been better if he had not attempted so much. He would have done well to have heeded Goethe's caution to Eckerman: "Beware of attempting a large work. If you have a great work in your head, nothing else thrives near it, all other thoughts are repelled, and the pleasantness of life itself is for the time lost. What exertion and expenditure of mental force are required to arrange and round off a great whole; and then what powers, and what a tranquil undisturbed situation in life, to express it with the proper fluency! If you have erred as to the whole, all your toil is lost; and further, if, in treating so extensive a subject, you are not perfectly master of your material in the details, the whole will be defective, and censure will be incurred." Shelley did not know this. He was ever labouring at long poems: but he has scarcely left one which, as a whole, is worthy of him; you can point to none and say, This is Shelley. Even had

he lived to an age of riper capacity, it may be doubted if a being so discontinuous, so easily hurried to and fro, would have possessed the settled, undeviating self-devotion that is necessary to a long and perfect composition. He had not, like Goethe, the cool shrewdness to watch for inspiration.

His success, as we have said, is in fragments; and the best of those fragments are lyrical. The very same isolation and suddenness of impulse which rendered him unfit for the composition of great works, rendered him peculiarly fit to pour forth on a sudden the intense essence of peculiar feeling "in profuse strains of unpremeditated art". Lord Macaulay has said that the words "bard" and "inspiration," generally so meaningless when applied to modern poets, have a meaning when applied to Shelley. An idea, an emotion grew upon his brain, his breast heaved, his frame shook, his nerves quivered with the "harmonious madness" of imaginative concentration. "Poetry," he himself tells us, "is not, like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will. A man cannot say, 'I will compose poetry'. The greatest poet even cannot say it; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our nature are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure. . . . Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds. We are aware of evanescent visitations of thought and feeling sometimes associated with place or person, sometimes regarding our own mind alone, and always arising unforeseen and departing unbidden, but elevating and delightful beyond all expression: so that even in the desire and the regret they leave, there cannot but be pleasure, participating as it does in the nature of its object.

It is, as it were, the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own ; but its footsteps are like those of a wind over the sea, which the coming calm erases, and whose traces remain only, as on the wrinkled sand which paves it." [1] In verse, Shelley has compared the skylark to a poet ; we may turn back the description on his own art and his own mind :—

" Keen as are the arrows
Of that silver sphere,
Whose intense lamp narrows
In the white dawn clear,
Until we hardly see, we feel that it is there.

" All the earth and air
With thy voice is loud,
As, when night is bare,
From one lonely cloud
The moon rains out her beams, and heaven is overflowed.

" What thou art we know not ;
What is most like thee ?
From rainbow-clouds there flow not
Drops so bright to see,
As from thy presence showers a rain of melody.

. . . . . .

" Like a high-born maiden
In a palace-tower,
Soothing her love-laden
Soul in secret hour
With music sweet as love, which overflows her bower.

" Like a glow-worm golden
In a dell of dew,
Scattering unbeholden
Its aërial hue
Among the flowers and grass which screen it from the view.

" Like a rose embowered
In its own green leaves,
By warm winds deflowered,
Till the scent it gives
Makes faint with too much sweet those heavy-winged thieves.

[1] " A Defence of Poetry," in his *Essays*.

" Sound of vernal showers
On the twinkling grass,
Rain-awakened flowers,
All that ever was
Joyous, and clear, and fresh, thy music doth surpass."

In most poets unearthly beings are introduced to express peculiar removed essences of lyrical rapture; but they are generally failures. Lord Byron tried this kind of composition in "Manfred," and the result is an evident failure. In Shelley, such singing solitary beings are almost uniformly successful; while writing, his mind really for the moment was in the state in which theirs is supposed always to be. He loved attenuated ideas and abstracted excitement. In expressing their nature he had but to set free his own.

Human nature is not, however, long equal to this sustained effort of remote excitement. The impulse fails, imagination fades, inspiration dies away. With the skylark it is well:—

" With thy clear keen joyance
Languor cannot be:
Shadow of annoyance
Never came near thee:
Thou lovest; but ne'er knew love's sad satiety ".

But in unsoaring human nature languor comes, fatigue palls, melancholy oppresses, melody dies away. The universe is not all blue sky; there is the thick fog and the heavy earth. " The world," says Mr. Emerson, " is mundane." A creeping sense of weight is part of the most aspiring nature. To the most thrilling rapture succeeds despondency, perhaps pain. To Shelley this was peculiarly natural. His dreams of reform, of a world which was to be, called up the imaginative ecstasy: his soul bounded forward into the future; but it is not possible even to the most abstracted and excited mind to place its happiness in the expected realisation of impossible schemes, and yet not occasionally be uncertain of those schemes. The rigid frame of society, the heavy

heap of traditional institutions, the solid slowness of ordinary humanity, depress the aspiring fancy. "Since our fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning." Occasionally we must think of our fathers. No man can always dream of ever altering all which is. It is characteristic of Shelley, that at the end of his most rapturous and sanguine lyrics there intrudes the cold consciousness of this world. So with his Grecian dreams:—

"A brighter Hellas rears its mountains
From waves serener far;
A new Peneus rolls its fountains
Against the morning-star.
Where fairer Tempes bloom, there sleep
Young Cyclads on a sunnier deep.

"A loftier Argo cleaves the main,
Fraught with a later prize;
Another Orpheus sings again,
And loves, and weeps, and dies:
A new Ulysses leaves once more
Calypso for his native shore."

But he ends:—

"O, cease! must hate and death return?
Cease! must men kill and die?
Cease! drain not to its dregs the urn
Of bitter prophecy.
The world is weary of the past—
Oh, might it die or rest at last!"[1]

In many of his poems the failing of the feeling is as beautiful as its short moment of hope and buoyancy.

The excellence of Shelley does not, however, extend equally over the whole domain of lyrical poetry. That species of art may be divided—not perhaps with the accuracy of science, but with enough for the rough purposes of popular criticism—into the human and the abstract. The sphere of the former is of course the actual life, passions, and actions

[1] "Hellas."

of real men,—such are the war-songs of rude nations especially; in that early age there is no subject for art but natural life and primitive passion. At a later time, when from the deposit of the *débris* of a hundred philosophies, a large number of half-personified abstractions are part of the familiar thoughts and language of all mankind, there are new objects to excite the feelings,—we might even say there are new feelings to be excited; the rough substance of original passion is sublimated and attenuated till we hardly recognise its identity. Ordinarily and in most minds the emotion loses in this process its intensity or much of it; but this is not universal. In some peculiar minds it is possible to find an almost dizzy intensity of excitement called forth by some fancied abstraction, remote altogether from the eyes and senses of men. The love-lyric in its simplest form is probably the most intense expression of primitive passion; yet not in those lyrics where such intensity is the greatest—in those of Burns, for example—is the passion so dizzy, bewildering, and bewildered, as in the "Epipsychidion" of Shelley, the passion of which never came into the real world at all, was only a fiction founded on fact, and was wholly—and even Shelley felt it—inconsistent with the inevitable conditions of ordinary existence. In this point of view, and especially also taking account of his peculiar religious opinions, it is remarkable that Shelley should have taken extreme delight in the Bible as a composition. He is the least biblical of poets. The whole, inevitable, essential conditions of real life—the whole of its plain, natural joys and sorrows—are described in the Jewish literature as they are described nowhere else. Very often they are assumed rather than delineated; and the brief assumption is more effective than the most elaborate description. There is none of the delicate sentiment and enhancing sympathy which a modern writer would think necessary; the inexorable facts are dwelt

on with a stern humanity, which recognises human feeling though intent on something above it. Of all modern poets, Wordsworth shares the most in this peculiarity; perhaps he is the only recent one who has it at all. He knew the hills beneath whose shade "the generations are prepared":—

> "Much did he see of men,
> Their passions and their feelings: chiefly those
> Essential and eternal in the heart,
> That mid the simple form of rural life
> Exist more simple in their elements,
> And speak a plainer language".[1]

Shelley has nothing of this. The essential feelings he hoped to change; the eternal facts he struggled to remove. Nothing in human life to him was inevitable or fixed; he fancied he could alter it all. His sphere is the "unconditioned"; he floats away into an imaginary Elysium or an expected Utopia; beautiful and excellent, of course, but having nothing in common with the absolute laws of the present world. Even in the description of mere nature the difference may be noted. Wordsworth describes the earth as we know it, with all its peculiarities; where there are moors and hills, where the lichen grows, where the slate-rock juts out. Shelley describes the universe. He rushes away among the stars; this earth is an assortment of imagery, he uses it to deck some unknown planet. He scorns "the smallest light that twinkles in the heavens". His theme is the vast, the infinite, the immeasurable. He is not of our home, nor homely; he describes not our world, but that which is common to all worlds—the Platonic idea of a world. Where it can, his genius soars from the concrete and real into the unknown, the indefinite, and the void.

Shelley's success in the abstract lyric would prepare us for expecting that he would fail in attempts at eloquence. The mind which bursts forward of itself into the inane, is not

[1] "Excursion," book i.

likely to be eminent in the composed adjustments of measured persuasion. A voluntary self-control is necessary to the orator: even when he declaims, he must not only let himself go; a keen will must be ready, a wakeful attention at hand, to see that he does not say a word by which his audience will not be touched. The eloquence of "Queen Mab" is of that unpersuasive kind which is admired in the earliest youth, when things and life are unknown, when all that is intelligible is the sound of words.

Lord Macaulay, in a passage to which we have referred already, speaks of Shelley as having, more than any other poet, many of the qualities of the great old masters; two of these he has especially. In the first place, his imagination is classical rather than romantic,—we should, perhaps, apologise for using words which have been used so often, but which hardly convey even now a clear and distinct meaning; yet they seem the best for conveying a distinction of this sort. When we attempt to distinguish the imagination from the fancy, we find that they are often related as a beginning to an ending. On a sudden we do not know how a new image, form, idea, occurs to our minds; sometimes it is borne in upon us with a flash, sometimes we seem unawares to stumble upon it, and find it as if it had long been there: in either case the involuntary, unanticipated appearance of this new thought or image is a primitive fact which we cannot analyse or account for. We say it originated in our imagination or creative faculty: but this is a mere expression of the completeness of our ignorance; we could only define the imagination as the faculty which produces such effects; we know nothing of it or its constitution. Again, on this original idea a large number of accessory and auxiliary ideas seem to grow or accumulate insensibly, casually, and without our intentional effort; the bare primitive form attracts a clothing of delicate materials—an adornment not altering its essences, but enhancing its effect. This we

call the work of the fancy. An exquisite delicacy in appropriating fitting accessories is as much the characteristic excellence of a fanciful mind, as the possession of large, simple, bold ideas is of an imaginative one. The last is immediate; the first comes minute by minute. The distinction is like what one fancies between sculpture and painting. If we look at a delicate statue—a Venus or Juno—it does not suggest any slow elaborate process by which its expression was chiselled and its limbs refined; it seems a simple fact; we look, and require no account of it; it exists. The greatest painting suggests, not only a creative act, but a decorative process: day by day there was something new; we could watch the tints laid on, the dresses tinged, the perspective growing and growing. There is something statuesque about the imagination; there is the gradual complexity of painting in the most exquisite productions of the fancy. When we speak of this distinction, we seem almost to be speaking of the distinction between ancient and modern literature. The characteristic of the classical literature is the simplicity with which the imagination appears in it; that of modern literature is the profusion with which the most various adornments of the accessory fancy are thrown and lavished upon it. Perhaps nowhere is this more conspicuous than in the modern treatment of antique subjects. One of the most essentially modern of recent poets—Keats—has an "Ode to a Grecian Urn"; it begins:—

"Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness!
Thou foster-child of Silence and slow Time,
Sylvan historian! who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?"

No ancient poet would have dreamed of writing thus. There would have been no indistinct shadowy warmth, no breath of surrounding beauty; his delineation would have been cold, distinct, chiselled like the urn itself. The use which such a poet as Keats makes of ancient mythology is exactly similar. He owes his fame to the inexplicable art with which he has breathed a soft tint over the marble forms of gods and goddesses, enhancing their beauty without impairing their chasteness. The naked kind of imagination is not peculiar to a mythological age. The growth of civilisation, at least in Greece, rather increased than diminished the imaginative bareness of the political art. It seems to attain its height in Sophocles. If we examine any of his greater passages, a principal beauty is their reserved simplicity. A modern reader almost necessarily uses them as materials for fancy: we are too used to little circumstance to be able to do without it. Take the passage in which Œdipus contrasts the conduct of his sons with that of his daughters:—

ὦ πάντ' ἐκείνῳ τοῖς ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ νόμοις
φύσιν κατεικασθέντε καὶ βίου τροφάς.
ἐκεῖ γὰρ οἱ μὲν ἄρσενες κατὰ στέγας
θακοῦσιν ἱστουργοῦντες, αἱ δὲ σύννομοι
τἄξω βίου τροφεῖα πορσύνουσ' ἀεί.
σφῷν δ', ὦ τέκν', οὓς μὲν εἰκὸς ἦν πονεῖν τάδε,
κατ' οἶκον οἰκουροῦσιν ὥστε παρθένοι,
σφὼ δ' ἀντ' ἐκείνων τἀμὰ δυστήνου κακὰ
ὑπερπονεῖτον. ἡ μέν ἐξ ὅτου νέας
τροφῆς ἔληξε καὶ κατίσχυσεν δέμας,
ἀεὶ μεθ' ἡμῶν δύσμορος πλανωμένη
γερονταγωγεῖ, πολλὰ μὲν κατ' ἀγρίαν
ὕλην ἄσιτος νηλίπους τ' ἀλωμένη,
πολλοῖσι δ' ὄμβροις ἡλίου τε καύμασι
μοχθοῦσα τλήμων, δεύτερ' ἠγεῖται τὰ τῆς
οἴκοι διαίτης, εἴ πατὴρ τροφὴν ἔχοι.[1]

[1] "Œdipus at Colonos," lines 337-352:—

"Oh, they! in habits and in soul at once
Shaped to the ways of Egypt,—where the men

What a contrast to the ravings of Lear! What a world of detail Shakespeare would have put into the passage! What talk of "sulphurous and thought-executing fires," "simulars of virtue," "pent-up guilts," and "the thick rotundity of the world"! Decorum is the principal thing in Sophocles. The conception of Œdipus is not—

> "Crowned with rank fumiter and furrow weeds,
> With harlocks, hemlock, nettle, and cuckoo-flowers".[1]

There are no "idle weeds"[2] among the "sustaining corn".[3] The conception of Lear is that of an old gnarled oak, gaunt and quivering in the stormy sky, with old leaves and withered branches tossing in the air, and all the complex growth of a hundred years creaking and nodding to its fall. That of Œdipus is the peak of Teneriffe, as we fancied it in our childhood, by itself and snowy, above among the stormy clouds, heedless of the angry winds and the desolate waves, —single, ascending, and alone. Or, to change the metaphor to one derived from an art where the same qualities of mind have produced kindred effects, ancient poetry is like a Grecian

> Sit by the fireside weaving, and their wives
> Toil in the field to furnish bread for both.
> So they whose duty was to suffer thus
> For you, my daughters, keep like girls at home,
> While in their stead you bear a wretch's woes.
> She here, since childhood's ways she left behind
> And gained a woman's vigour, ever near,
> Ill-fated, guides the old man's wandering feet,
> Famished and barefoot often, straying still
> Day after day the savage forest through,
> Scorched by the sun and drenched by many a storm,
> In patient toil her very household's wants
> Neglected so her father may be fed."
>
> (Forrest Morgan.)

[1] "King Lear," iii. 2. [2] *Ibid.*, iv. 4. [3] *Ibid.*

temple, with pure form and rising columns,—created, one fancies, by a single effort of an originative nature: modern literature seems to have sprung from the involved brain of a Gothic architect, and resembles a huge cathedral—the work of the perpetual industry of centuries—complicated and infinite in details; but by their choice and elaboration producing an effect of unity which is not inferior to that of the other, and is heightened by the multiplicity through which it is conveyed. And it is this warmth of circumstance—this profusion of interesting detail—which has caused the name "romantic" to be perseveringly applied to modern literature.

We need only to open Shelley, to show how essentially classical in his highest efforts his art is. Indeed, although nothing can be farther removed from the staple topics of the classical writers than the abstract lyric, yet their treatment is nearly essential to it. We have said, its sphere is in what the Germans call the unconditioned—in the unknown, immeasurable, and untrodden. It follows from this that we cannot know much about it. We cannot know detail in tracts we have never visited; the infinite has no form; the immeasurable no outline: that which is common to all worlds is simple. There is therefore no scope for the accessory fancy. With a single soaring effort imagination may reach her end; if she fail, no fancy can help her; if she succeed, there will be no petty accumulations of insensible circumstance in a region far above all things. Shelley's excellence in the abstract lyric is almost another phrase for the simplicity of his impulsive imagination.—He shows it on other subjects also. We have spoken of his bare treatment of the ancient mythology. It is the same with his treatment of nature. In the description of the celestial regions quoted before—one of the most characteristic passages in his writings—the details are few, the air thin, the lights distinct. We are conscious of an

essential difference if we compare the "Ode to the Nightingale," in Keats, for instance—such verses as—

"I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs:
But, in embalmèd darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild,
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine,
Fast-fading violets covered up in leaves,
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

"Darkling I listen; and for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Called him soft names in many a musèd rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath:
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy.
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod":

—with the conclusion of the ode "To a Skylark"—

"Yet if we could scorn
Hate, and pride, and fear;
If we were things born
Not to shed a tear,
I know not how thy joy we ever should come near.

"Better than all measures
Of delightful sound,
Better than all treasures
That in books are found,
Thy skill to poet were, thou scorner of the ground!

"Teach me half the gladness
That thy brain must know;
Such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow,
The world should listen then, as I am listening now."

We can hear that the poetry of Keats is a rich, composite, voluptuous harmony; that of Shelley a clear single ring of penetrating melody.

Of course, however, this criticism requires limitation. There is an obvious sense in which Shelley is a fanciful, as contra-distinguished from an imaginative poet. These words, being invented for the popular expression of differences which can be remarked without narrow inspection, are apt to mislead us when we apply them to the exact results of a near and critical analysis. Besides the use of the word "fancy" to denote the power which adorns and amplifies the product of the primitive imagination, we also employ it to denote the weaker exercise of the faculty which itself creates those elementary products. We use the word "imaginative" only for strong, vast, imposing, interesting conceptions: we use the word "fanciful" when we have to speak of smaller and weaker creations, which amaze us less at the moment and affect us more slightly afterwards. Of course, metaphysically speaking, it is not likely that there will be found to be any distinction; the faculty which creates the most attractive ideas is doubtless the same as that which creates the less attractive. Common language marks the distinction, because common people are impressed by the contrast between what affects them much and what affects them little; but it is no evidence of the entire difference of the latent agencies. Speech, as usual, refers to sensations, and not to occult causes. Of fancies of this sort, Shelley is full: whole poems—as the "Witch of Atlas"—are composed of nothing else. Living a good deal in, and writing a great deal about, the abstract world, it was inevitable that he should often deal in fine subtleties, affecting very little the concrete hearts of real men. Many pages of his are, in consequence, nearly unintelligible, even to good critics of common poetry. The air is too rarefied for hardy and

healthy lungs: these like, as Lord Bacon expressed it, "to work upon stuff". From his habitual choice of slight and airy subjects, Shelley may be called a fanciful, as opposed to an imaginative, poet; from his bare delineations of great objects, his keen expression of distinct impulses, he should be termed an imaginative rather than a fanciful one.

Some of this odd combination of qualities Shelley doubtless owed to the structure of his senses. By one of those singular results which constantly meet us in metaphysical inquiry, the imagination and fancy are singularly influenced by the bodily sensibility. One might have fancied that the faculty by which the soul soars into the infinite, and sees what it cannot see with the eye of the body, would have been peculiarly independent of that body. But the reverse is the case. Vividness of sensation seems required to awaken, delicacy to define, copiousness to enrich, the visionary faculty. A large experience proves that a being who is blind to this world will be blind to the other; that a coarse expectation of what is not seen will follow from a coarse perception of what is seen. Shelley's sensibility was vivid but peculiar. Hazlitt used to say, "he had seen him; and did not like his looks". He had the thin keen excitement of the fanatic student; not the broad, natural energy which Hazlitt expected from a poet. The diffused life of genial enjoyment which was common to Scott and to Shakespeare, was quite out of his way. Like Mr. Emerson, he would have wondered they could be content with a "mean and jocular life". In consequence, there is no varied imagery from human life in his poetry. He was an abstract student, anxious about deep philosophy; and he had not that settled, contemplative, allotted acquaintance with external nature which is so curious in Milton, the greatest of studious poets. The exact opposite, however, to Shelley, in the nature of his sensibility, is Keats. That great poet used to pepper his tongue, "to

enjoy in all its grandeur the cool flavour of delicious claret". When you know it, you seem to read it in his poetry. There is the same luxurious sentiment; the same poise on fine sensation. Shelley was the reverse of this; he was a water-drinker; his verse runs quick and chill, like a pure crystal stream. The sensibility of Keats was attracted too by the spectacle of the universe; he could not keep his eyes from seeing, or his ears from hearing, the glories of it. All the beautiful objects of nature reappear by name in his poetry. On the other hand, the abstract idea of beauty is for ever celebrated in Shelley; it haunted his soul. But it was independent of special things; it was the general surface of beauty which lies upon all things. It was the smile of the universe and the expression of the world; it was not the vision of a land of corn and wine. The nerves of Shelley quivered at the idea of loveliness; but no coarse sensation obtruded particular objects upon him. He was left to himself with books and reflection.

So far, indeed, from Shelley having a peculiar tendency to dwell on and prolong the sensation of pleasure, he has a perverse tendency to draw out into lingering keenness the torture of agony. Of his common recurrence to the dizzy pain of mania we have formerly spoken; but this is not the only pain. The nightshade is commoner in his poems than the daisy. The nerve is ever laid bare; as often as it touches the open air of the real world, it quivers with subtle pain. The high intellectual impulses which animated him are too incorporeal for human nature; they begin in buoyant joy, they end in eager suffering.

In style, said Mr. Wordsworth—in workmanship, we think his expression was—Shelley is one of the best of us. This too, we think, was the second of the peculiarities to which Lord Macaulay referred when he said that Shelley had, more than any recent poet, some of the qualities of

the great old masters. The peculiarity of his style is its intellectuality; and this strikes us the more from its contrast with his impulsiveness. He had something of this in life. Hurried away by sudden desires, as he was in his choice of ends, we are struck with a certain comparative measure and adjustment in his choice of means. So in his writings; over the most intense excitement, the grandest objects, the keenest agony, the most buoyant joy, he throws an air of subtle mind. His language is minutely and acutely searching; at the dizziest height of meaning the keenness of the words is greatest. As in mania, so in his descriptions of it, the acuteness of the mind seems to survive the mind itself. It was from Plato and Sophocles, doubtless, that he gained the last perfection in preserving the accuracy of the intellect when treating of the objects of the imagination; but in its essence it was a peculiarity of his own nature. As it was the instinct of Byron to give in glaring words the gross phenomena of evident objects, so it was that of Shelley to refine the most inscrutable with the curious nicety of an attenuating metaphysician. In the wildest of ecstasies his self-anatomising intellect is equal to itself.

There is much more which might be said, and which ought to be said, of Shelley; but our limits are reached. We have not attempted a complete criticism; we have only aimed at showing how some of the peculiarities of his works and life may be traced to the peculiarity of his nature.

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